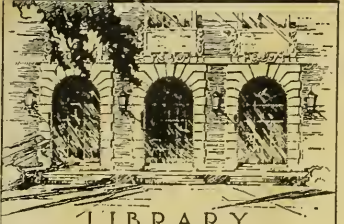

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WILLING TO DIE.

VOL. III.

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WILLING TO DIE.

BY

J SHERIDAN LE FANU,

AUTHOR OF

"UNCLE SILAS,"

&c. &c.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

LONDON:
HURST AND BLACKETT, PUBLISHERS,
13, GREAT MARLBOROUGH STREET.
1873.

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LONDON:
PRINTED BY MACDONALD AND TUGWELL, BLENHEIM HOUSE,
BLENHEIM STREET, OXFORD STREET

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WILLING TO DIE.

CHAPTER I.

AFTER OFFICE HOURS.

NEXT day our doctor called. He was very kind. He had made mamma many visits, and attended me through my tedious fever, and would never take a fee after the first one. I daresay that other great London physicians, whom the world reputes worldly, often do similar charities by stealth. My own experience is that affliction like ours does not lower the sufferer's estimate of human nature. It is a great discriminator of character, and sifts men like wheat. Those among our friends who are

all chaff it blows away altogether; those who have noble attributes, it leaves all noble. There is no more petulance, no more hurry or carelessness; we meet, in an after-contact with them, be it much or little, only the finer attributes, gentleness, tenderness, respect, patience.

I do not remember one of those who had known us in better days, among the very few who now knew where to find us, who did not show us even more kindness than they could have had opportunity of showing, if we had been in our former position. Who could be kinder than Mr. Forrester? Who more thoughtful than Mr. Carmel, to whom at length we had traced the flowers, and the books, and the piano, that were such a resource to me; and who had, during my illness, come every day to see mamma?

In his necessarily brief visits, Sir Jacob Lake was energetic and cheery; there was in his manner that which inspired confidence; but I fancied this day, as he was taking his

leave of mamma, that I observed something like a shadow on his face, a transitory melancholy, that alarmed me. I accompanied him downstairs, and he stopped for a moment in the lobby outside the drawing-room.

"Has there been anything done since about that place—Malory, I think you call it?" he asked.

"No," I answered; "there is not the least chance. Sir Harry Rokestone is going to sell it, Mr. Jarlcot says; just through hatred of us, he thinks. He's an old enemy of ours; he says he hates our very name; and he won't write; he hasn't answered a single letter of Mr. Forrester's."

"I was only going to say that it wouldn't do; she could not well bear so long a journey just now. I think she had better make no effort; she must not leave this at present."

"I'm afraid you think her very ill," I said, feeling myself grow pale.

"She is ill; and she will never be much better; but she may be spared to you for a long time yet. This kind of thing, however, is always uncertain; and it may end earlier than we think—I don't say it is likely, only possible. You must send for me whenever you want me; and I'll look in now and then, and see that all goes on satisfactorily."

I began to thank him earnestly, but he stopped me very good-naturedly. He could spare me little more than a minute; I walked with him to the hall-door, and although he said but little, and that little very cautiously, he left me convinced that I might lose my darling mother any day or hour. He had implied this very vaguely, but I was sure of it. People who have suffered great blows like mine, regard the future as an adversary, and believe its threatenings.

In flurry and terror I returned to the drawing-room, and shut the door; then, with the instinct that always prevails, I

went to mamma's room and sat down beside her.

I suppose everyone has felt as I have felt. How magically the society of the patient, if not actually suffering, re-assures us! The mere contiguity, the voice, the interest she takes in the common topics of our daily life, the cheerful and easy tone, even the little peevishness about the details of the sick-room, soon throw death again into perspective, and the instinct of life prevails against all facts and logic.

The form of heart-complaint from which my mother suffered had in it nothing revolting. I think I never remember her so pretty. The tint of her lips, and the colour of her cheeks, always lovely, were now more delicately brilliant than ever; and the lustre of her eyes, thus enhanced, was quite beautiful. The white tints a little paler, and her face and figure slightly thinner, but not unbecomingly, brought back a picture so girlish that I wondered while I looked;

and when I went away the pretty face haunted me as the saddest and gentlest I had ever seen.

So many people have said that the approach of death induces a change of character that I almost accept it for a general law of nature. I saw it, I know, in mamma. Not exactly an actual change, perhaps, but, rather, a subsidence of whatever was less lovely in her nature, and a proportionate predominance of all its sweetness and gentleness. There came also a serenity very different from the state of mind in which she had been from papa's death up to the time of my illness. I do not know whether she was conscious of her imminent danger. If she suspected it, she certainly did not speak of it to me, or to Rebecca Torkill. But death is a subject on which some people, I believe, practise as many reserves as others do in love.

Next day mamma was much better, and sat in our drawing-room, and I read and

talked to her, and amused her with my music. She sat in slippers and dressing-gown in an easy-chair, and we talked over a hundred plans which seemed to interest her. The effort to cheer mamma did me good, and I think we were both happier that day than we had been since ruin had so tragically overtaken us.

While we were thus employed at home, events connected with us and our history were not standing still in other places.

Mr. Forrester's business was very large; he had the assistance of two partners; but all three were hard worked. The offices of the firm occupied two houses in one of the streets which run down from the Strand to the river, at no great distance from Temple Bar. I saw these offices but once in my life; I suppose there was little to distinguish them and their arrangements from those of other well-frequented chambers; but I remember being struck with their air of business and regularity, and by the complicated

topography of two houses fused into one.

Mr. Forrester, in his private office, had locked up his desk. He was thinking of taking his leave of business for the day. It was now past four, and he had looked into the office where the collective firm did their business, and where his colleagues were giving audience to a deputation about a complicated winding-up. This momentary delay cost him more time than he intended, for a clerk came in and whispered in his ear,

"A gentleman wants to see you, sir."

"Why, hang it! I've left the office," said Mr. Forrester, tartly—"don't you see? Here's my hat in my hand! Go and look for me in my office, and you'll see I'm not there."

Very deferentially, notwithstanding this explosion, the messenger added—

"I thought, sir, before sending him away, you might like to see him; he seemed to think he was doing us a favour in looking

in, and he has been hearing from you, and would not take the trouble to write; and he won't call again."

"What's his name?" asked Mr. Forrester, vacillating a little.

"Sir Harry Rokestone," he said.

"Sir Harry Rokestone? Oh! Well, I suppose I must see him. Yes, I'll see him; bring him up to my private room."

Mr. Forrester had hardly got back, laid aside his hat and umbrella, and placed himself in his chair of state behind his desk, when his aide-de-camp returned and introduced "Sir Harry Rokestone."

Mr. Forrester rose, and received him with a bow. He saw a tall man, with something grand and simple in his gait and erect bearing, with a brown handsome face, and a lofty forehead, noble and stern as if it had caught something of the gloomy character of the mountain scenery among which his home was. He was dressed in the rustic and careless garb of an old-fashioned country

gentleman, with gaiters up to his knees, as if he were going to stride out upon the heather with his gun on his shoulder and his dogs at his heel.

Mr. Forrester placed a chair for this gentleman, who, with hardly a nod, and without a word, sat down. The door closed, and they were alone.

CHAPTER II.

SIR HARRY SPEAKS.

"YOU'RE Mr. Forrester?" said Sir Harry, in a deep, clear voice, quite in character with his appearance, and with a stern eye fixed on the solicitor.

That gentleman made a slight inclination of assent.

"I got all your letters, sir—everyone," said the rustic baronet.

Mr. Forrester bowed.

"I did not answer one of them."

Mr. Forrester bowed again.

"Did it strike you, as a man of business, sir, that it was rather an odd omission your not mentioning where the ladies represent-

ing the late Mr. Ware's interests—if he had any remaining, which I don't believe—are residing?"

"I had actually written——" answered Mr. Forrester, turning the key in his desk, and slipping his hand under the cover, and making a momentary search. He had hesitated on the question of sending the letter or not; but, having considered whether there could be any possible risk in letting him know, and having come to the conclusion that there was none, he now handed this letter, a little obsolete as it was, to Sir Harry Rokestone.

"What's this?" said Sir Harry, breaking the seal and looking at the contents of the note, and thrusting it, thinking as it seemed all the time of something different, into his coat-pocket.

"The present address of Mrs. and Miss Ware, which I understood you just now to express a wish for," answered Mr. Forrester.

"Express a wish, sir, for their address!" exclaimed Sir Harry, with a scoff. "Dall me if I did, though! What the deaul, man, should I want o' their *address*, as ye call it? They may live where they like for me. And so Ware's dead—died a worse death than the hangman's; and died not worth a plack, as I always knew he would. And what made you write all those foolish letters to me? Why did you go on plaguing me, when you saw I never gave you an answer to one of them? You that should be a man of head, how could ye be such a mafflin?" His northern accent became broader as he became more excited.

The audacity and singularity of this old man disconcerted Mr. Forrester. He did not afterwards understand why he had not turned him out of his room.

"I think, Sir Harry, you will find my reasons for writing very distinctly stated in my letters, if you are good enough to look into them."

"Ay, so I did; and I don't understand them, nor you neither."

It was not clear whether he intended that the reasons or the attorney were beyond his comprehension. Mr. Forrester selected the first interpretation, and, I daresay, rightly, as being the least offensive.

"Pardon me, Sir Harry Rokestone," said he, with a little dry dignity; "I have not leisure to throw away upon writing nonsense; I am one of those men who are weak enough to believe that there are rights besides those defined by statute or common law, and duties, consequently, you'll excuse me for saying, even more obligatory—Christian duties, which, in this particular case, plainly devolve upon you."

"Christian flam! Humbug! and you an attorney!"

"I'm not accustomed, sir, to be talked to in that way," said Mr. Forrester, who felt that his visitor was becoming insupportable.

"Of course you're not; living in this

town you never hear a word of honest truth," said Sir Harry; "but I'm not so much in the dark; I understand you pretty well, now; and I think you a precious impudent fellow."

Both gentlemen had risen by this time, and Mr. Forrester, with a flush in his cheeks, replied, raising his head as he stooped over his desk while turning the key in the lock:

"And I beg to say, sir, that I, also, have formed my own very distinct opinion of you!"

Mr. Forrester flushed more decidedly, for he felt, a little too late, that he had perhaps made a rather rash speech, considering that his visitor seemed to have so little control over his temper, and also that he was gigantic.

The herculean baronet, however, who could have lifted him up by the collar, and flung him out of the window, only smiled sardonically, and said,

"Then we part, you and I, wiser men than we met. You write me no more letters, and I'll pay you no more visits."

With another cynical grin, he turned on his heel, and walked slowly down the stairs, leaving Mr. Forrester more ruffled than he had been for many a day.

CHAPTER III.

THE OLD LOVE.

THE hour had now arrived at which our room looked really becoming. It had been a particularly fine Autumn; and I have mentioned the effect of a warm sunset streaming through the deep windows upon the oak panelling. This light had begun to fade, and its melancholy serenity had made us silent. I had heard the sound of wheels near our door, but that was nothing unusual, for carts often passed close by, carrying away the rubbish that had accumulated in the old houses now taken down.

Anne Owen, our Malory maid, peeped in at the door—came in, looking frightened and important, and closed it before she

spoke. She was turning something about in her fingers.

"What is it, Anne?" I asked.

"Please, miss, there's an old gentleman downstairs; and he wants to know, ma'am," she continued, now addressing mamma, "whether you'll be pleased to see him."

Mamma raised herself, and looked at the girl with anxious, startled eyes.

"What is that you have got in your hand?" I asked.

"Oh! I beg your pardon, ma'am; he told me to give you this, please."

And she handed a card to mamma.

She looked at it and grew very pale. She stood up with a flurried air.

"Are you sure?" she said.

"Please, ma'am?" inquired the girl in perplexity.

"No matter. Ethel, dear, it is he. Yes, I'll see him," she said to the girl, in an agitated way; "show him up. Ethel, it's Harry Rokestone—don't go; he is so stern

—I know how he'll speak to me—but I ought not to refuse to see him."

I was angry at my mother's precipitation. If it had rested with me, what an answer the savage old man should have had! I was silent. By this time the girl was again at the hall-door. The first moment of indignation over, I was thunderstruck. I could not believe that anything so portentous was on the eve of happening.

The moments of suspense were not many. My eyes were fixed on the door as if an executioner were about to enter by it. It opened, and I saw—need I tell you?—the very same tall, handsome old man I had seen in the chapel of Cardyllion Castle.

"Oh! Mabel," he said, and stopped. It was the most melancholy, broken voice I had ever heard. "My darling!"

My mother stood with her hand stretched vaguely towards him, trembling.

"Oh! Mabel, it is you, and we've met at last!"

He took her hand in one of his, and laid the other suddenly across his eyes and sobbed. There was silence for a good while, and then he spoke again.

"My pretty Mabel! I lost ye; I tried to hate ye, Mabel; but all would not do, for I love ye still. I was mad and broken-hearted—I tried to hate ye, but I couldn't; I'd a' given my life for you all the time, and you shall have Malory—it's your own—I've bought it—ye'll not be too proud to take a gift from the old man, my only darling! The Spring and Summer are over, it's Winter now wi' the old fellow, and he'll soon lie under the grass o' the kirk-garth, and what does it all matter then? And you, bonny Mabel, there's wonderful little change wi' you!"

He was silent again, and tears coursed one another down his rugged cheeks.

"I saw you sometimes a long way off, when you didn't think I was looking, and the sight o' ye wrung my heart, that I didn't

hold up my head for a week after. A lonely man I've been for your sake, Mabel; and down to Gouden Friars, and among the fells, and through the lonnins of old Clusted Forest, and sailin' on the mere, where we two often were, thinkin' I saw ye in the shaddas, and your voice in my ear as far away as the call o' the wind—dreams, dreams—and now I've met ye."

He was holding mamma's hand in his, and she was crying bitterly.

"I knew nothing of all this till to-day—I got all Forrester's letters together. I was on the Continent—and you've been complaining, Mabel; but you're looking so young and bonny! It was care, care was the matter, care and trouble; but that's all over, and you shall never know anxiety more—you'll be well again—you shall live at Malory, if you like it, or Gouden Friars—Mardykes is to let. I've a right to help you, Mabel, and you have none to refuse my help, for I'm the only living kinsman you

have. I don't count that blackguard lord for anything. You shall never know care again. For twenty years and more an angry man and dow I've been, caring for no one, love or likin', when I had lost yours. But now it is past and over, and the days are sped."

A few melancholy and broken words more, and he was gone, promising to return next day at twelve, having seen Mr. Forrester in the meantime at his house in Piccadilly, and had a talk with him.

He was gone. He had not spoken a word to me—had not even appeared conscious that I was present. I daresay he was not. It was a little mortifying. To me he appeared a mixture, such as I never saw before, of brutality and tenderness. The scene had moved me.

Mamma was now talking excitedly. It had been an agitating meeting, and, till he had disclosed his real feelings, full of uncertainty. To prevent her from exerting

herself too much, I took my turn in the conversation, and, looking from the window, still in the direction in which his cab had disappeared, I descanted with immense delight on the likelihood of his forthwith arranging that Malory should become our residence.

As I spoke, I turned about to listen for the answer I expected from mamma. I was shocked to see her look very ill. I was by her side in a moment. She said a few words scarcely audible, and ceased speaking before she had ended her sentence. Her lips moved, and she made an eager gesture with her hand; but her voice failed. She made an effort, I thought, to rise, but her strength forsook her, and she fainted.

CHAPTER IV.

ALONE IN THE WORLD.

SIR HARRY did not find Mr. Forrester at home; the solicitor was at a consultation in the Temple. Thither drove the baronet, who was impetuous in most things, and intolerant of delay where an object lay near his heart. Up to the counsel's chambers in the Temple mounted Sir Harry Rokestone. He hammered his double-knock at the door as peremptorily as he would have done at his own hall-door.

Mr. Forrester afforded him just half a minute; and they parted good friends, having made an appointment for the purpose of talking over poor mamma's affairs,

and considering what was best to be done.

Sir Harry strode with the careless step of a mountaineer, along the front of the buildings, till he reached the entrance to which, in answer to a sudden inquiry, Mr. Forrester had directed him. Up the stairs he marched, and stopped at the door of the chambers occupied by Mr. Carmel. There he knocked again as stoutly as before. The door was opened by Edwyn Carmel himself.

"Is Mr. Carmel here?" inquired the old man.

"I am Mr. Carmel," answered he.

"And I am Sir Harry Rokestone," said the baronet. "I found a letter from you this morning; it had been lying at my house unopened for some time," said the baronet.

Mr. Carmel invited him to come in. There were candles lighted, for it was by this time nearly dark; he placed a chair for his visitor: they were alone.

Sir Harry Rokestone seated himself, and began :

"There was no need, sir, of apology for your letter; intervention on behalf of two helpless and suffering ladies was honourable to you; but I had also heard some particulars from their own professional man of business; that, however, you could not have known. I have called to tell you that I quite understand the case. So much for your letter. But, sir, I have been informed that you are a Jesuit."

"I am a Catholic priest, sir."

"Well, sir, I won't press the point; but the ruin of that family has been brought about, so far as I can learn, by gentlemen of that order. They got about that poor foolish creature, Lady Lorrimer; and, by cajoleries and terror, they got hold of every sixpence of her fortune, which, according to all that's right and kind in nature, should have gone to her nearest kindred."

Sir Harry's eyes were fixed on him, as if he expected an answer.

"Lady Lorrimer did, I suppose, what pleased her best in her will," said the young man, coldly; "Mrs. Ware had expectations, I believe, which have been, you say, disappointed."

"And do you mean to tell me that you don't know that fact for certain?" said the old gentleman, growing hot.

"I'm not certain of anything of which I have no proof, Sir Harry," answered Mr. Carmel. "If I were a Jesuit, and your statement were a just one, still I should know no more about the facts than I do now; for it would not be competent for me to inquire into the proceedings of my superiors in the order. It is enough for me to say that I know nothing of any such influence exerted by any human being upon Lady Lorrimer; and I need scarcely add that I have never, by word or act, en-

deavoured ever so slightly to influence Lady Lorrimer's dealings with her property! Your ear, sir, has been abused by slander."

"By Jea! Here's modesty!" said Sir Harry, exploding in a gruff laugh of scorn, and standing up. "What a pack o' gaumless gannets you must take us for! Look-ye, now, young sir. I have my own opinion about all that. And tell your superiors, as you call them, they'll never get a plack of old Harry Rokestone's money, while hand and seal can bind, and law's law: and if I catch a priest in my house, ye may swear he'll get out of it quicker than he came in. I'd thank you more for your letter, sir, if I was a little more sure of the motive; and now I've said my say, and I wish ye good evening."

With a fierce smile, the old man looked at him steadily for a few seconds, and then turning abruptly, left the room and shut the door, with a firm clap, after him.

That was, to me, an anxious night. Mam-

ma continued ill; I had written rather a wild note for our doctor; but he did not come for many hours. He did not say much; he wrote a prescription, and gave some directions; he was serious and reserved, which, in a physician, means alarm. In answer to my flurried inquiries, as I went down-stairs by his side, he said:

"I told you, you recollect, that it is a capricious kind of thing; I hope she may be better when I look in in the morning; the nature of it is that it may end at any time, with very little warning; but with caution she may live a year, or possibly two years. I've known cases, as discouraging as hers, where life has been prolonged for three years."

Next morning came, and I thought mamma much better. I told her all that was cheery in the doctor's opinion, and amused her with plans for our future. But the hour was drawing near when doctors' opinions, and friends' hopes and flatteries, and the

kindly illusions of plans looking pleasantly into an indefinite future, were to be swallowed in the tremendous event.

About half an hour before our kind doctor's call, mamma's faintness returned. I now began, and not an hour too soon, to despair. The medicine he had ordered the day before, to support her in these paroxysms, had lost its power. Mamma had been for a time in the drawing-room, but having had a long fainting-fit there, I persuaded her, so soon as she was a little recovered, to return to her bed.

I find it difficult, I may say, indeed, impossible, to reduce the occurrences of this day to order. The picture is not, indeed, so chaotic as my recollection of the times and events that attended my darling Nelly's death. The shock, in that case, had affected my mind. But I do not believe that any one retains a perfectly arranged recollection of the flurried and startling scenes that wind up our hopes in the dread catastrophe. I

never met a person yet who could have told the story of such a day with perfect accuracy and order.

I don't know what o'clock it was when the doctor came. There is something of the character of sternness in the brief questions, the low tone, and the silent inspection that mark his last visit to the sick-room. What is more terrible than the avowed helplessness that follows, and his evident acquiescence in the inevitable?

"Don't go. Oh, don't go yet; wait till I come back, only a few minutes; there might be a change, and something might be done."

I entreated; I was going up to mamma's room; I had come down with him to the drawing-room.

"Well, my dear, I'll wait." He looked at his watch. "I'll remain with you for ten minutes."

I suppose I looked very miserable, for I saw a great compassion in his face. He

was very good-natured, and he added, placing his hand upon my arm, and looking gently in my face, "But, my poor child, you must not flatter yourself with hopes, for I have none—there are none."

But what so headstrong and so persistent as hope? Terrible must be that place where it never comes.

I had scarcely left the drawing-room, when Sir Harry Rokestone, of the kindly change in whom I had spoken to our good doctor, knocked at the hall-door. Our rustic maid, Anne Owen, who was crying, let him in, and told him the sudden news; he laid his hand against the door-post and grew pale. He did not say a word for as long as you might count twenty, then he asked,

"Is the doctor here?"

The girl led the way to the drawing-room.

"Bad news, doctor?" said the tall old man, in an agitated voice, as he entered, with his eyes fixed on Sir Jacob Lake. "My

name is Rokestone—Sir Harry Rokestone. Tell me, is it so bad as the servant says? You have not given her up?"

The doctor shook his head; he advanced slowly a step or two to meet Sir Harry, and said, in a low tone,

"Mrs. Ware is dying—sinking very fast."

Sir Harry walked to the mantelpiece, laid his hand on it, and stood there without moving. After a little he turned again, and came to Sir Jacob Lake.

"You London doctors—you're so hurried," he said, a little wildly, "from place to place. I think—I think—look, doctor; save her! save her, man!"—he caught the doctor's wrist in his hand—"and I'll make your fortune. Ye need never do an hour's work more. Man was never so rewarded, not for a queen."

The doctor looked very much offended; but, coarse as the speech was, it was delivered with a pathetic and simple vehemence that disarmed him.

"You mistake me, sir," he said. "I take a very deep interest in this case. I have known Mrs. Ware from the time when she came to live in London. I hope I do my duty in every case, but in this I have been particularly anxious, and I do assure you, if—— What's that?"

It was, as Shakespeare says, "a cry of women," the sudden shrilly clamour of female voices heard through distant doors.

The doctor opened the door, and stood at the foot of the stairs.

"Ay, that's it," he said, shaking his head a little. "It's all over."

CHAPTER V.

A PROTECTOR.

I WAS in mamma's room; I was holding up her head; old Rebecca and Anne Owen were at the bedside. My terrified eyes saw the doctor drawing near softly in the darkened room. I asked him some wild questions, and he answered gently, "No, dear; no, no."

The doctor took his stand at the bedside, and, with his hands behind his back, looked down at her face sadly. Then he leaned over. He laid his hand gently on mamma's, put his fingers to her wrist, felt, also, for the beating of her heart, looked again at her face, and rose from his stooping posture

with a little shake of the head and a sigh, looked in the still face once more for a few seconds, and turning to me, said tenderly,

"You had better come away, dear; there's nothing more to be done. You must not distress yourself."

That last look of the physician at his patient, when he stands up, and becomes on a sudden no more than any other spectator, his office over, his command ended, is terrifying.

For two or three minutes I scarcely knew who was going or coming. The doctor, who had just gone downstairs, returned with an earnest request from Sir Harry Rokestone that in an hour or so he might be permitted to come back and take a last look of mamma. He did come back, but his heart failed him. He could not bear to see her now. He went into the drawing-room, and, a few minutes later, Rebecca Torkill came into my room, where, by this time, I was crying alone, and said:

"Ye mustn't take on so, my darling; rouse yourself a bit. That old man, Sir Harry Rokestone, is down in the drawing-room in a bit of a taking, and he says he must see you before he goes."

"I can't see him, Rebecca," I said.

"But what am I to say to him?" said she.

"Simply that. Do tell him I can't go down or see anybody."

"But ain't it as well to go and have it over, miss?—for see you he will, I am sure of that; and I can't manage him."

"Does he seem angry?" I said, "or only in grief? I daresay he is angry. Yesterday, when he was here, he never spoke one word to me—he took no notice of me whatever."

At another time an interview with Sir Harry Rokestone might have inspired many more nervous misgivings; as it was, I had only this: I knew that he had hated papa, and I, as my father's child, might well "stand within his danger," as the old phrase

was. And the eccentric and violent old man, I thought, might, in the moment and agony of having lost for ever the object of an affection which my father had crossed, have sent for me, his child, simply to tell me that with my father's blood I had inherited his curse.

"I can't say, miss, indeed. He was talking to himself, and stamping with his thick shoes on the floor a bit as he walked. But ain't it best to have done with him at once, if he ain't friendly, and not keep him here, coming and going?—for see you he will, sooner or later."

"I don't very much care. Perhaps you are right. Yes, I will go down and see him," I said. "Go you down, Rebecca, and tell him that I am coming."

I had been lying on my bed, and required to adjust my hair, and dress a little.

As I came downstairs a few minutes later, I passed poor mamma's door; the key was turned in it. Was I walking in a dream?

Mamma dead, and Sir Harry Rokestone waiting in the drawing-room to see me! I leaned against the wall, feeling faint for a minute.

As I approached the drawing-room door, which was open, I heard Rebecca's voice talking to him; and then the old man said, in a broken voice:

"Where's the child? Bring her here. I will see the bairn."

I was the "bairn" summoned to his presence. This broad north-country dialect, the language, I suppose, of his early childhood, always returned to him in moments when his feelings were excited. I entered the room, and he strode towards me.

"Ha! the lassie," he cried, gently. There was a little tremor in his deep voice; a pause followed, and he added, vehemently, "By the God above us, I'll never forsake you!"

He held me to his heart for some seconds without speaking.

"Gimma your hand. I love you for her sake," he said, and took my hand firmly and kindly in his, and he looked earnestly in my face for awhile in silence. "You're like her; but, oh! lassie, you'll never be the same. There'll never be another such as Mabel."

Tears, which he did not dry or conceal, trickled down his rugged cheeks.

He had been talking with Rebecca Torkill, and had made her tell him everything she could think of about mamma.

"Sit ye down here, lass," he said to me, having recovered his self-possession. "You are to come home wi' me, to Gouden Friars, or wherever else you like best. You shall have music and flowers, and books and dresses, and you shall have your maid to wait on you, like other young ladies, and you shall bring Rebecca with you. I'll do my best to be kind and helpful; and you'll be a blessing to a very lonely old man; and as I love you now for Mabel's sake,

I'll come to love you after for your own."

I did not think his stern old face could look so gentle and sorrowful, and the voice, generally so loud and commanding, speak so tenderly. The light of that look was full of compassion and melancholy, and indicated a finer nature than I had given the uncouth old man credit for. He seemed pleased by what I said; he was doing, he felt, something for mamma in taking care of the child she had left so helpless.

Days were to pass before he could speak to me in a more business-like way upon his plans for my future life, and those were days of agitation and affliction, from which, even in memory, I turn away.

I am going to pass over some little time. An interval of six weeks finds me in a lofty wainscoted room, with two stone-shafted windows, large and tall, in proportion, admitting scarcely light enough, however, to make it cheerful. These windows are placed at the end of an oblong apartment,

and the view they command is melancholy and imposing. I was looking through the sudden hollow of a mountain gorge, with a level of pasture between its craggy sides, upon a broad lake, nearly three hundred yards away, with a barrier of mountains rising bold and purple from its distant margin. A file of gigantic trees stretches from about midway down to the edge of the lake, and partakes of the sombre character of the scene. On the steeps at either side, in groups or singly, stand some dwarf oak and birch-trees, scattered and wild, very picturesque, but I think enhancing the melancholy of the view.

For me this spot, repulsive as it would have been to most young people, had a charm; not, indeed, that of a "happy valley," but the charm of seclusion, which to a wounded soul is above price. Those who have suffered a great reverse will understand my horror of meeting the people whom I had once known, my recoil from recognition,

and how welcome are the shadows and silence of the cloister compared with the anguish of a comparative publicity.

Experience had early dissipated the illusions of youth, and taught me to listen to the whisperings of hope with cold suspicion. I had no trust in the future—my ghastly mischances had filled me with disgust and terror. My knowledge haunted me; I could not have learned it from the experience of another, though my instructor had come to me from the dead. I was here, then, under no constraint, not the slightest. It was of my own free choice that I came, and remained here. Sir Harry Rokestone would have taken me anywhere I pleased.

Other people spoke of him differently; I can speak only of my own experience. Nothing could be more considerate and less selfish than his treatment of me, nothing more tender and parental. Kind as he was, however, I always felt a sort of awe in his presence. It was not, indeed, quite the

awe that is founded on respect—he was old—in most relations stern—and his uneducated moral nature, impetuous and fierce, seemed capable of tragic things. It was not a playful nature, with which the sympathies and spirit of a young person could at all coalesce.

Thormen Fell, at the north of the lake, that out-topped the rest, and shielded us from the wintry wind, rearing its solemn head in solitude, snowy, rocky, high in air, the first of the fells visible, the first to greet me, far off in the sunshine, with its dim welcome as I returned to Golden Friars. It was friendly, it was kindly, but stood aloof and high, and was always associated in my mind with danger, isolation, and mystery. And I think my liking for Sir Harry Rokestone partook of my affection for Thormen Fell.

So, as you have no doubt surmised, I was harboured in the old baronet's feudal castle of Dorracleugh. A stern, wild, melancholy

residence, but one that suited wonderfully my present mood.

He was at home; another old gentleman, whose odd society I liked very well, was also at that time an inmate of the house. I will tell you more about him in my next chapter.

CHAPTER VI.

A WARNING.

THE old gentleman I speak of, I had seen once before—it was at Malory. He was that very Mr. Lemuel Blount whom I and Laura Grey had watched with so much interest as he crossed the court-yard before our windows, followed by a chaise.

As Sir Harry and I, at the end of our northward journey from London, arrived before the door of his ancient house of Dorracleugh, Mr. Blount appeared at the threshold in the light, and ran down, before the servant could reach it, to the door of our chaise. There was something kindly and pleasant in the voice of this old man,

who was so earnest about our comforts. I afterwards found that he was both wise and simple, a sound adviser, and as merry often as a good-natured boy. He contrasted, in this latter respect, very agreeably for me, with Sir Harry Rokestone, whom solitary life, and a habit of brooding over the irreparable, had made both gloomy and silent.

Mr. Blount was easily amused, and was something of an innocent gossip. He used to go down to the town of Golden Friars every day, and gather all the news, and bring home his budget, and entertain me with it, giving all the information I required with respect to the *dramatis personæ.* He liked boating as well as I did, and although the storms of the equinox prevailed, and the surrounding mountains, with their gorges, made the winds squally and uncertain, and sailing upon the lake in certain states of the weather dangerous, he and I used to venture out I daresay oftener than was strictly prudent. Sir Harry used to attack

him for these mad adventures, and once or twice grew as tempestuous almost as the weather. Although I was afraid of Sir Harry, I could not help laughing at Mr. Blount's frightened and penitent countenance, and his stolen glances at Sir Harry, so like what I fancied those of a fat schoolboy might be when called up for judgment before his master.

Sir Harry knew all the signs of the weather, and it ended by his putting us under condition never to go out without his leave, and old Mr. Blount's pleadings and quarrelsome resentment under his prohibition were almost as laughable as his alarms.

In a little time neighbours began to call upon me, and I was obliged, of course, to return these visits; but neighbours do not abound in these wild regions, and my quiet, which I had grown to love, was wonderfully little disturbed.

One morning at breakfast, among the letters laid beside Sir Harry was one, on

opening which his face darkened suddenly, and an angry light glowed in his deep-set eyes. He rapped his knuckles on the table, he stood up and muttered, sat down again in a little while, and once more looked into the letter. He read it through this time; and then turning to Lemuel Blount, who had been staring at him in silence, as it seemed to me knowing very well what the subject of the letter must be—

"Look at that," said the Baronet, whisking the letter across the table to Mr. Blount. "I don't understand him—I never did."

Mr. Blount took the letter to the window, and read it thoughtfully.

"Come along," said the Baronet, rising, and beckoning him with his finger, "I'll give him an answer."

Sir Harry, with these words, strode out of the room, followed by Mr. Blount; and I was left alone to my vain conjectures. It was a serene and sunny day; the air, as in late Autumn it always is, though the sun

has not lost its power, was a little sharp. Some hours later, I and my old comrade, Mr. Blount, had taken to the water. A boatman sat in the bow. I held the tiller, abandoned to me by my companion, in right of my admitted superiority in steering, an art which I had learned on the estuary at Cardyllion. Mr. Blount was not so talkative as usual. I said to him at last:

"Do you know, Mr. Blount, I once saw you, before I met you here."

"Did you?" said he. "But I did not see you. Where was that?"

"At Malory, near Cardyllion, after the wreck of the *Conway Castle*, when Mr. Marston was there."

"Yes, so he was," said the old gentleman; "but I did not know that any of Mr. Ware's family were at home at the time. You may have seen me, but I did not see you—or, if I did, you made no impression upon me."

This was one of my good friend's un-

conscious compliments which often made me smile.

"And what became of that Mr. Marston?" I asked. "He had a wonderful escape!"

"So he had—he went abroad."

"And is he still abroad?"

"About six weeks ago he left England again; he was here only for a flying visit of two or three months. It would be wise, I think, if he never returned. I think he has definitely settled now, far away from this country, and I don't think we are likely to see his face again. You're not keeping her near enough to the wind."

I was curious to learn more about this Mr. Marston, of whom Mr. Carmel and Laura Grey—each judging him, no doubt, from totally different facts, and from points of view so dissimilar—had expressed such singularly ill opinions.

"You know Mr. Marston pretty well, do you?" I asked.

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"Yes, very well; I have been trying to do him a service," answered Mr. Blount. "See, see, there—see—those can't be wild ducks? Blessed are the peace-makers. I wish I could, and I think I may. Now, I think you may put her about, eh?"

I did as he advised.

"I have heard people speak ill of that Mr. Marston," I said; "do you know any reason why he should not be liked?"

"Why, yes—that is by people who sit in judgment upon their neighbours—he has been an ill friend to himself. I know but one bad blot he has made, and that, I happen to be aware, hurt no one on earth but himself; but there is no use in talking about him, it vexes me."

"Only one thing more—where is he now?"

"In America. Put this over your feet, please—the air is cold—allow me to arrange it. Ay, the Atlantic is wide enough—let him rest—out of sight, out of

mind, for the present at least, and so best."

Our talk now turned upon other subjects, and returned no more to Mr. Marston during our sail.

In this house, as in most other old country-houses, there is a room that is called the library. It had been assigned to Mr. Blount as his special apartment. He had made me free of it—either to sit there and read, whenever I should take a fancy to do so, or to take away any of the books to the drawing-room. My life was as quiet and humdrum as life could be; but never was mortal in the enjoyment of more absolute liberty. Except in the matter of drowning myself and Mr. Blount in the mere, I could do in all respects exactly as I pleased. Dear old Rebecca Torkill was established as a retainer of the house, to my great comfort—she talked me to sleep every night, and drank a cup of tea with me every afternoon in my room. The quietude and seclusion of my life recalled my early days, and

the peaceful routine of Malory. Of course, a time might come when I should like all this changed a little—for the present, it was the only life I thought endurable.

About a week after my conversation with Mr. Blount during our sail, Sir Harry Rokestone was called away for a short time by business; and I had not been for many days in the enjoyment of my *tête-à-tête* with Mr. Blount, when there occurred an incident which troubled me extremely, and was followed by a state of vague suspense and alarm, such as I never expected to have known in that quiet region.

One morning as I sat at breakfast with Mr. Blount for my *vis-à-vis*, and no one by but the servant who had just handed us our letters, I found before me an envelope addressed with a singularity that struck me as a little ominous. The direction was traced, not in the ordinary handwriting, but in Roman characters, in imitation of printing; and the penmanship was thin and feeble,

but quite accurate enough to show that it was not the work of a child.

I was already cudgelling my brains to discover whether I could remember among my friends any waggish person who might play me a trick of this kind; but I could recollect no one; especially at a time when my mourning would have made jesting of that kind so inopportune. Odder still, it bore the Malory post-mark, and unaccountable as this was, its contents were still more so. They were penned in the same Roman character, and to the following effect:

"MISS WARE,—Within the next ten days, a person will probably visit Golden Friars, who intends you a mischief. So soon as you see, you will recognise your enemy.

"Yours,

"A FRIEND."

My first step would have been to consult Mr. Blount upon this letter; but I could

tell him nothing of my apprehensions from Monsieur Droqville, in whom my fears at once recognised the "enemy" pointed at by the letter. It might possibly, indeed, be some one else, but by no means, I thought, so probably as the other. Who was my "friend," who subscribed this warning? If he was not Mr. Carmel, who else could he be? And yet, why should not Mr. Carmel write to me as frankly as he had spoken and written before? If it came from him, the warning could not point to Monsieur Droqville. There was more than enough to perplex and alarm one in this enigmatical note.

CHAPTER VII.

MINE ENEMY.

I WAS afraid to consult even Rebecca Torkill; she was a little given to talking, and my alarms might have become, in a day or two, the property of Sir Harry's housekeeper. There is no use in telling you all the solutions which my fears invented for this riddle.

In my anxiety I wrote to the Rector's wife at Cardyllion, telling her that I had got an anonymous note, bearing the Malory post-mark, affecting so much mystery that I was totally unable to interpret it. I begged of her therefore to take every opportunity of making out, if possible, who

was the author, and to tell me whether there was any acquaintance of mine at present there, who might have written such a note by way of a practical joke to mystify me; and I entreated of her to let me know her conjectures. Then I went into the little world of Cardyllion and inquired about all sorts of people, great and small, and finally I asked if Mr. Carmel had been lately there.

In addition to this, I wrote to the postmaster, describing the appearance of the letter I had got, and asking whether he could help me to a description of the person who had posted it? Every time a new theory struck me, I read my "friend's" note over again.

At length I began to think that it was most probably the thoughtless production of some real but harmless friend, who intended herself paying me a visit here, on visiting Golden Friars. A female visitor was very likely, as the note was framed so as to indi-

cate nothing of the sex of the "enemy;" and two or three young lady friends, not very reasonably, had been attacking me in their letters for not answering more punctually.

My mind was perpetually working upon this problem. I was very uncomfortable, and at times frightened, and even agitated. I don't, even now, wonder at the degree to which I suffered.

A note of a dream in one of my fragmentary diaries at that time will show you how nervous I was. It is set down in much greater detail than you or I can afford it here. I will just tell you its "heads," as old sermons say. I thought I had arrived here, at Dorracleugh, after a long journey. Mr. Blount and a servant came in carrying one of my large black travelling boxes, and tugged it along the ground. The servant then went out, and Mr. Blount, who I fancied was very pale, looked at me fixedly, and placing his finger to his lip in token of

silence, softly went out, also, and shut the door, leaving me rather awe-struck. My box, I thought, on turning my eyes upon it again, from my gaze at Mr. Blount, seemed much longer, and its shape altered; but such transformations do not trouble us in our dreams, and I began fumbling with the key, which did not easily fit the lock. At length I opened it, and instead of my dresses I saw a long piece of rumpled linen, and perceived that the box was a coffin. With the persistent acquiescence in monstrosities by which dreams are characterized, I experienced the slightest possible bewilderment at this, and drew down the linen covering, and discovered the shrouded face of Mr. Marston. I was absolutely horrified, and more so when the dead man sat up, with his eyes open, in the coffin, and looked at me with an expression so atrocious that I awoke with a scream, and a heart bounding with terror, and lay awake for more than an hour. This dream was the vague em-

bodiment of one of my conjectures, and pointed at one of the persons whom, against all probability, I had canvassed as the "enemy" of my warning.

Solitude and a secret fear go a long way towards making us superstitious. I became more and more nervous as the suspense extended from day to day. I was afraid to go into Golden Friars, lest I should meet my enemy. I made an excuse, and stayed at home from church on Sunday for the same reason. I was afraid even of passing a boat upon the lake. I don't know whether Mr. Blount observed my increased depression; we played our hit of backgammon, nevertheless, as usual, in the evening, and took, when the weather was not boisterous, our little sail on the lake.

I heard from the Rector's wife. She was not able, any more than the Cardyllion postmaster, to throw the least light upon my letter. Mr. Carmel had not been in that part of the world for a long time. I

was haunted, nevertheless, by the image of Mr. Marston, whom my dream had fixed in my imagination.

These letters had reached me as usual as we sat at breakfast. Mine absorbed me, and by demolishing all theories, had directed me upon new problems. I sat looking into my tea-cup, as if I could divine from it. I raised my eyes at length and said,

"When did you say—I forget—you last heard from Mr. Marston?"

He looked up. I perceived that he had been just as much engrossed by his letter as I had been with mine. He laid it down, and asked me to repeat my question. I did. Mr. Blount smiled.

"Well, that is very odd. I have just heard from him," said he, raising the letter he had been reading by the corner. "It came by the mail that reached London yesterday evening."

"And where is he?" I asked.

"He's at New York now; but he says

he is going in a few days to set out for Canada, or the backwoods—he has not yet made up his mind which. I think, myself, he will choose the back-settlements; he has a passion for adventure."

At these words of Mr. Blount, my theories respecting Mr. Marston fell to the ground, and my fears again gathered about the meaner figure of Monsieur Droqville; and so soon as breakfast was ended, I sat down in the window, and studied my anonymous letter carefully once more.

Business called Mr. Blount that evening to Golden Friars; and after dinner I went into the library, and sat looking out at the noble landscape. A red autumnal sunset illuminated the summits of the steep side of the glen, at my left, leaving all the rest of the cleugh in deep, purple-grey shadow. It opens, as I told you, on the lake, which stretched before me in soft shadow, except where its slow moving ripple caught the light with a fiery glimmer; and far away the

noble fells, their peaks and ribs touched with the same misty glow, stood out like majestic shadows, and closed the view sublimely.

I sat here, I can't say reading, although I had an old book open upon my knees. I was too anxious, and my head too busy, to read. Twilight came, and then gradually a dazzling, icy moonlight transformed the landscape. I leaned back in my low chair, my head and shoulders half hidden among the curtains, looking out on the beautiful effect.

This moonlight had prevailed for, I dare say, ten or fifteen minutes, when something occurred to rouse me from my listless reverie. Some object moved upon the window-stone, and caught my eye. It was a human hand suddenly placed there; its fellow instantly followed; an elbow, a hat, a head, a knee; and a man kneeled in the moonlight upon the window-stone, which was there some eight or ten feet from the ground.

Was I awake or in a dream? Gracious Heaven! There were the scarred forehead and the stern face of Mr. Marston with knit brows, and his hand shading his eyes, as he stared close to the glass into the room.

I was in the shadow, and cowered back deeper into the folds of the curtain. He plainly did not see me. He was looking into the further end of the room. I was afraid to cry out; it would have betrayed me. I remained motionless, in the hope that, when he was satisfied that there was no one in the room, he would withdraw from his place of observation, and go elsewhere.

I was watching him with the fascinated terror of a bird, in its ivied nook, when a kite hovers at night within a span of it.

He now seized the window-sash—how I prayed that it had been secured—and with a push or two the window ascended, and he stepped in upon the floor. The cold night air entered with him; he stood for a minute looking into the room, and then very softly

he closed the window. He seemed to have made up his mind to establish himself here, for he lazily pushed Mr. Blount's easy-chair into the recess at the window, and sat down very nearly opposite to me. If I had been less shocked and frightened, I might have seen the absurdity of my situation.

He leaned back in Mr. Blount's chair, like a tired man, and extended his heels on the carpet; his hand clutched the arm of the chair. His face was in the bright white light of the moon, his chin was sunk on his chest. His features looked haggard and wicked. Two or three times I thought he saw me, for his eyes were fixed on me for more than a minute; but my perfect stillness, the deep shadow that enveloped me, and the brilliant moonlight in his eyes, protected me.

Suddenly I heard a step—it was Mr. Blount; the door opened, and the step was arrested; to my infinite relief a voice, it was Mr. Blount's, called a little sternly:

"Who's that?"

"The prodigal, the outcast," answered

Mr. Marston's deep voice, bitterly. "I have been, and am, too miserable not to make one more trial, and to seek to be reconciled. You, sir, are very kind—you are a staunch friend; but you have never yet done all you could do for me. Why have you not faith? Your influence is unlimited."

"My good gracious!" exclaimed Mr. Blount, not moving an inch from where he stood. "Why, it is only this morning I received your letter from New York. What is all this? I don't understand."

"I came by the same mail that brought my letter. Second thoughts are the best. I changed my mind," said the young man, standing up. "Why should I live the sort of life he seems to have planned for me, if he intends anything better at any time? And if he don't, what do I owe him? It is vindictive and unnatural. I'm worn out; my patience has broken down."

"I could not have believed my eyes," said Mr. Blount. "I did not—dear, dear

me! I don't know what to make of it; he'll be very much displeased. Mr. Marston, sir, you seem bent on ruining yourself with him, quite."

"I don't know—what chance have I out there? Out of sight out of mind, you used to say. He'd have forgotten me, you'd have forgotten me; I should not have had a friend soon, who knew or cared whether I was alive or dead. Speak to him; tell him he may as well listen to me. I'm perfectly desperate," and he struck his open hand on the back of the chair, and clenched the sentence with a bitter oath.

"I am not to blame for it," said Mr. Blount.

"I know that; I know it very well, Mr. Blount. You are too good a friend of our family. I know it, and I feel it—I do, indeed; but, look here, where's the good of driving a fellow to desperation? I tell you I'll do something that will bring it to a crisis; I can't stand the hell I live in. And

let him prosecute me if he likes; it is very easy for me to put a pistol to my head—it's only half a second and it's over—and I'll leave a letter telling the world how he has used me, and then see how he'll like the mess he has made of it."

"Now, pardon me, sir," said Mr. Blount, ceremoniously, "that's all stuff; I mean he won't believe you. When I have an unacceptable truth to communicate, I make it a rule to do so in the most courteous manner; and, happily, I have, hitherto, found the laws of truth and of politeness always reconcilable; he has told me, my dear sir, fifty times, that you are a great deal too selfish ever to hurt yourself. There is no use, then, in trying, if I may be permitted the phrase, to bully him. If you seek, with the smallest chance of success, to make an impression upon Sir Harry Rokestone, you must approach him in a spirit totally unlike that. I'll tell you what you must do. Write me a penitent letter, asking my intercession,

and if you can make, with perfect sincerity, fair promises for the future, and carefully avoid the smallest evidence of the spirit you chose to display in your last—and it is very strange if you have learned nothing—I'll try again what I can do."

The young man advanced, and took Mr. Blount's hand and wrung it fervently.

I don't think Mr. Blount returned the demonstration with equal warmth. He was rather passive on the occasion.

"Is he—here?" asked Mr. Marston.

"No, and you must not remain an hour in this house, nor at Golden Friars, nor shall you go to London, but to some perfectly quiet place; write to me, from thence, a letter such as I have described, and I will lay it before him, with such representations of my own as perhaps may weigh with him, and we shall soon know what will come of it. Have the servants seen you?"

"Not one."

"So much the better."

"I scaled your window about ten minutes ago. I thought you would soon turn up, and I was right. I know you will forgive me."

"Well, no matter, you had better get away as you came; how was that?"

"By boat, sir; I took it at the Three Oaks."

"It is all the better you were not in the town; I should not like him to know you are in England, until I have got your letter to show him; I hope, sir, you will write in it no more than you sincerely feel. I cannot enter into any but an honest case. Where did your boat wait?"

"At the jetty here?"

"Very good; as you came by the window, you may as well go by it, and I will meet you a little way down the path; I may have something more to say."

"Thank you, sir, from my heart," said Marston.

"No, no, don't mind, I want you to get

away again; there, get away as quickly as you can." He had opened the window for him. "Ay, you have climbed that many a time when you were a boy; you should know every stone by heart."

"I'll do exactly as you tell me, sir, in all things," said the young man, and dropped lightly from the window-stone to the ground, and I saw his shadowy figure glide swiftly down the grass, towards the great lime-trees that stand in a receding row between the house and the water. Mr. Blount lowered the window quietly, and looked for a moment after him.

"Some men are born to double sorrow —sorrow for others—sorrow for themselves. I don't quite know what to make of him."

The old man sighed heavily, and left the room. I felt very like a spy, and very much ashamed of myself for having overheard a conversation certainly not intended for my ears. I can honestly say it was not curiosity that held me there; that I was beyond

measure distressed at my accidental treachery; and that, had there been a door near enough to enable me to escape unseen, I should not have overheard a sentence of what passed. But I had not courage to discover myself; and wanting nerve at the beginning to declare myself, I had, of course, less and less as the conference proceeded, and my situation became more equivocal.

The departure of Mr. Blount, whom I now saw descending the steps in pursuit of his visitor, relieved me, and I got away from the room, haunted by the face that had so lately appeared to me in my ominous dream, and by the voice whose tones excited a strange tremor, and revived stranger recollections.

In the drawing-room, before a quarter of an hour, I was joined by Mr. Blount. Our *tête-à-tête* was an unusually silent one, and, after tea, we played a rather spiritless hit or two of backgammon.

I was glad when the time came to get to my room, to the genial and garrulous society of Rebecca Torkill; and after my candle was put out, I lay long enough awake, trying to put together the as yet imperfect fragments of a story and a situation which were to form the ground-work of the drama in which I instinctively felt that I was involved.

CHAPTER VIII.

ONE MORE CHANCE.

SIR HARRY came home, and met me more affectionately and kindly than ever. I soon perceived that there was something of more than usual gravity under discussion between him and Mr. Blount. I knew, of course, very well what was the question they were debating. I was very uncomfortable while this matter was being discussed; Mr. Blount seemed nervous and uneasy; and it was plain that the decision was not only suspended but uncertain. I don't suppose there was a more perturbed little family in all England at that moment,

over whom, at the same time, there hung apparently no cloud of disaster.

At last I could perceive that something was settled; for the discussions between Mr. Blount and Sir Harry seemed to have lost the character of debate and remonstrance, aud to have become more like a gloomy confidence and consultation between them. I can only speak of what I may call the external appearance of these conversations, for I was not permitted to hear one word of their substance.

In a little while Sir Harry went away again. This time his journey, I afterwards learned, was to one of the quietest little towns in North Wales, where his chaise drew up at the Bull Inn. The tall northern baronet got out of the chaise, and strode to the bar of that rural hostelry.

"Is there a gentleman named Marston staying here?" he asked of the plump elderly lady who sat within the bow-window of the bar.

"Yes, sir, Mr. Marston, Number Seven, up one pair of stairs."

"Up-stairs now?" asked Sir Harry.

"He'll be gone out to take his walk, sir, by this time," answered the lady.

"Can I talk to you for a few minutes, anywhere, madame, in private?" asked Sir Harry.

The old lady looked at him, a little surprised.

"Yes, sir," she said. "Is it anything very particular, please?"

"Yes, ma'am, very particular," answered the baronet.

She called to her handmaid, and installed her quickly in her seat, and so led the baronet to an unoccupied room on the ground-floor. Sir Harry closed the door, and told her who he was. The landlady recognised his baronetage with a little courtesy.

"I'm a relation of Mr. Marston's, and I have come down here to make an inquiry;

I want to know whether he has been leading an orderly, quiet life since he came to your house."

"No one more so, please, sir; a very nice regular gentleman, and goes to church every Sunday he's been here, and that is true. We have no complaint to make of him, please, sir; and he has paid his bill twice since he came."

The woman looked honest, with frank, round eyes.

"Thank you, ma'am," said Sir Harry; "that will do."

An hour later it was twilight, and Mr. Marston, on entering his sitting-room after his walk, saw the baronet, who got up from his chair before the fire as he came in.

The young man instantly took off his hat, and stood near the door, the very image of humility. Sir Harry did not advance, or offer him his hand; he gave him a nod. Nothing could be colder than this reception.

"So, Richard, you have returned to England, as you have done most other things, without consulting me," said the cold, deep voice of Sir Harry.

"I've acted rashly sir, I fear. I acted on an impulse. I could not resist it. It was only twelve hours before the ship left New York when the thought struck me. I ought to have waited. I ought to have thought it over. It seemed to me my only chance, and I'm afraid it has but sunk me lower in your esteem."

"It is clear you should have asked my leave first, all things considered," said Sir Harry, in the same tone.

The young man bowed his head.

"I see that very clearly now, sir; but I have been so miserable under your displeasure, and I do not always see things as my calmer reason would view them. I thought of nothing but my chance of obtaining your forgiveness, and, at so great a distance, I despaired."

"So it was to please me you set my authority at naught? By Jea! that's logic."

Sir Harry spoke this with a scornful and angry smile.

"I am the only near kinsman you have left, sir, of your blood and name."

"My name, sir!" challenged Sir Harry, fiercely.

"My second name is Rokestone—called after you," pleaded Mr. Marston.

"By my sang, young man, if you and I had borne the same name, I'd have got the Queen's letter, and changed mine to Smith."

To this the young gentleman made no reply. His uncle broke the silence that followed.

"We'll talk at present, if you please, as little as need be; there's nothing pleasant to say between us. But I'll give you a chance; I'll see if you are a changed man, as your letter says. I'll try what work is in you, or what good. You said you'd like farming. Well, we'll see what sort of farmer you'll

make. You'll do well to remember 'tis but a trial. In two or three days Mr. Blount will give you particulars by letter. Good evening. Don't come down; stay here. I'll go alone. Say no more; I'll have no thanks or professions. Your conduct, steadiness, integrity, shall guide me. That's all. Farewell."

Mr. Marston, during this colloquy, had gradually advanced a little, and now stood near the window. Sir Harry accompanied his farewell with a short nod, and stalked down the stairs. Mr. Marston knew he meant what he said, and therefore did not attempt to accompany him downstairs. And so, with a fresh pair of horses, Sir Harry immediately started on his homeward journey.

I, who knew at the time nothing of what I afterwards learned, was still in a suspense which nobody suspected. It was ended one evening by Sir Harry Rokestone, who said,

"To-morrow my nephew, Richard Mar-

ston, will be here to stay, I have not yet determined for how long. He is a dull young man. You'll not like him; he has not a word to throw at a dog."

So, whatever his description was worth, his announcement was conclusive, and Richard Marston was to become an inmate of Dorracleugh next day. I find my diary says, under date of the next day:

"I have been looking forward, with a trepidation I can hardly account for, to the arrival which Sir Harry announced yesterday. The event of the day occurred at three o'clock. I was thinking of going out for a walk, and had my hat and jacket on, and was standing in the hall. I wished to postpone, as long as I could, the meeting with Mr. Marston, which I dreaded. At that critical moment his double knock at the hall-door, and the distant peal of our rather deep-mouthed bell, startled me. I guessed it was he, and turned to run up to my room,

but met Sir Harry, who said, laying his hand gently on my shoulder,

"'Wait, dear—this is my nephew. I saw him from the window. I want to introduce him.'

"Of course I had to submit. The door was opened. There he was, the veritable Mr. Marston, of Malory, the hero of the *Conway Castle*, of the duel, and likewise of so many evil stories—the man who had once talked so romantically and so madly to me. I felt myself growing pale, and then blushing. Sir Harry received him coldly enough, and introduced me, simply mentioning my name and his; and then I ran down the steps, with two of the dogs as my companions, while the servants were getting in Mr. Marston's luggage.

"I met him again at dinner. He is very little changed, except that he is much more sun-burnt. He has got a look, too, of command and melancholy. I am sure he has

suffered, and suffering, they say, makes people better. He talked very little during dinner, and rather justified Sir Harry's description. Sir Harry talked about the farm he intends for him—they are to look at it to-morrow together. Mr. Blount seems to have got a load off his mind.

"The farm is not so far away as I had imagined—it is only at the other side of the lake, about five hundred acres at Clusted, which came to Sir Harry, Mr. Blount says, through the Mardykes family. I wonder whether there is a house upon it—if so, he will probably live at the other side of the lake, and his arrival will have made very little difference to us. So much the better, perhaps.

"I saw him and Sir Harry, at about eight o'clock this morning, set out together in the big boat, with two men, to cross the lake.

"Farming is, I believe, a very absorbing pursuit. He won't feel his solitude much; and Mr. Blount says he will have to go to

fairs and markets. It is altogether a grazing farm."

The reader will perceive that I am still quoting my diary.

"To-day old Miss Goulding, of Wrybiggins, the old lady whom the gossips of Golden Friars once assigned to Sir Harry as a wife, called with a niece who is with her on a visit, so I suppose they had heard of Mr. Marston's arrival, and came to see what kind of person he is. I'm rather glad they were disappointed. I ordered luncheon for them, and I saw them look toward the door every time it opened, expecting, I am sure, to see Mr. Marston. I maliciously postponed telling them, until the very last moment, that he was at the other side of the mere, as they call the lake, although I suffered for my cruelty, for they dawdled on here almost interminably.

"Sir Harry and Mr. Marston did not return till tea-time, when it was quite dark; they had dined at a farm-house at the other

side. Sir Harry seems, I think, a little more friendly with him. They talked, it is true, of nothing but farming and live stock; and Mr. Blount joined. I took, therefore, in solitude, to my piano, and, when I was tired of that, to my novel.

"A very dull evening—the dullest, I think, I've passed since we came to Dorracleugh. I daresay Mr. Marston will make a very good farmer. I hope very much there may be a suitable residence found for him at the other side of the lake."

Next day my diary contains the following entry:

"Mr. Marston off again at eight o'clock to his farm. Mr. Blount and I took a sail to-day, with Sir Harry's leave, in the small boat. He tells me that there is no necessity for Mr. Marston's going every day to the farm—that Sir Harry has promised him a third of whatever the farm, under his management, makes. He seems very anxious to please Sir Harry. I can't conceive what

can have made me so nervous about the arrival of this very humdrum squire, whose sole object appears to be the prosperity of his colony of cows and sheep.

"Sunday.—Of course to-day he has taken a holiday, but he has not given us the benefit of it. He chose to walk all day, instead of going to church with us to Golden Friars. It is not far from Haworth. So he prefers a march of four and twenty miles to the fatigue of our society!"

On the Tuesday following I find, by the same record, Sir Harry went to visit his estate of Tarlton, about forty miles from Golden Friars, to remain away for three or four days. That day I find also Mr. Marston was, as usual, at his farm at Clusted, and did not come home till about nine o'clock.

I went to my room immediately after his arrival, so that he had an uninterrupted *tête-à-tête* with Mr. Blount.

Next day he went away at his usual early

hour, and returned not so late. I made an excuse of having some letters to write, and left the two gentlemen to themselves a good deal earlier than the night before.

"Mr. Marston certainly is very little in my way; I have not spoken twenty words to him since his arrival. I begin to think him extremely impertinent."

The foregoing is a very brief note of the day, considering how diffuse and particular I often was when we were more alone. I make up for it on the following day. The text runs thus:

"Mr. Marston has come off his high horse, and broken silence at last. It was blowing furiously in the morning, and I suppose, however melancholy he may be, he has no intention of drowning himself. At all events, there has been no crossing the mere this morning.

"He has appeared, for the first time since his arrival, at breakfast. Sir Harry's absence seems to have removed a great con-

straint. He talked very agreeably, and seemed totally to have forgotten the subject of farming; he told us a great deal of his semi-military life in Spain, which was very amusing. I know he made me laugh heartily. Old Mr. Blount laughed also. Our breakfast was a very pleasant meal. Mr. Blount was himself in Spain for more than a year when he was young, and got up and gave us a representation of his host, an eccentric fan-maker, walking with his toes pointed and his chest thrown out, and speaking sonorous Spanish with pompous gesture. I had no idea he had so much fun in him. The good-natured old man seemed quite elated at our applause and very real laughter.

"Mr. Marston suddenly looked across the lake, and recollected his farm.

"'How suddenly that storm went down!' he said. 'I can't say I'm glad of it, for I suppose I must make my usual trip, and visit my four-footed friends over the way.'

"'No,' said Mr. Blount; 'let them shift

for themselves to-day; I'll take it on myself. There's no necessity for you going every day as you do.'

"'But how will it be received by the authorities? Will my uncle think it an omission? I should not like him to suppose that, under any temptation, I had forgotten my understanding with him.'

"He glanced at me. Whether he thought me the temptation, or only wished to include me in the question, I don't know.

"'Oh! no,' said Mr. Blount; 'stay at home for this once—I'll explain it all; and we can go out and have a sail, if the day continues as fine as it promises.'

"Mr. Marston hesitated; he looked at me as if for an opinion, but I said nothing.

"'Well,' he said, 'I can't resist. I'll take your advice, Mr. Blount, and make this a holiday.'

"I think Mr. Marston very much improved in some respects. His manners and conversation are not less spirited, but

gentler; and he is so very agreeable! I think he has led an unhappy life, and no doubt was often very much in the wrong. But I have remarked that we condemn people not in proportion to their moral guilt, but in proportion to the inconvenience their faults inflict on us. I wonder very much what those stories were which caused Mr. Carmel and Laura Gray to speak of him so bitterly and sternly? They were both so good that things which other people would have thought lightly enough of, would seem to them enormous. I dare say it is all about debt, or very likely play; and people who have possibly lost money by his extravagance have been exaggerating matters, and telling stories their own way. He seems very much sobered now, at all events. One can't help pitying him.

"He went down to the jetty before luncheon. I found afterwards that it was to get cloaks and rugs arranged for me.

"He lunched with us, and we were all

very talkative. He certainly will prevent our all falling asleep in this drowsy place. We had such a pleasant sail. I gave him the tiller; but his duties as helmsman did not prevent his talking. We could hear one another very well, in spite of the breeze, which was rather more than Sir Harry would have quite approved of.

"Mr. Marston had many opportunities to-day of talking to me without any risk of being overheard. He did not, however, say a single word in his old vein. I am very glad of this; it would be provoking to lose his conversation, which is amusing, and, I confess, a great resource in this solitude.

"He is always on the watch to find if I want anything, and gets or does it instantly. I wish his farm was at this side of the lake. I dare say when Sir Harry comes back we shall see as little as ever of him. It will end by his being drowned in that dangerous lake. It seems odd that Sir Harry, who is so

tender of my life and Mr. Blount's, should have apparently no feeling whatever about his. But it is their affair. I'm not likely to be consulted; so I need not trouble my head about it.

"I write in my room, the day now over, and dear old Rebecca Torkill is fussing about from table to wardrobe, and from wardrobe to drawers, pottering, and fidgeting, and whispering to herself. She has just told me that Mrs. Shackleton, the housekeeper here at Dorracleugh, talked to her a good deal this evening about Mr. Marston. She gives a very good account of him. When he went to school, and to Oxford, she saw him only at intervals, but he was a manly, good-natured boy she said, 'and never, that she knew, any harm in him, only a bit wild, like other young men at such places.' I write, as nearly as I can, Rebecca's words.

"The subject of the quarrel with Sir Harry Rokestone, Mrs. Shackleton says, was simply that Mr. Marston positively refused to marry

some one whom his uncle had selected for a niece-in-law. That is exactly the kind of disobedience that old people are sometimes most severe upon. She told Rebecca to be very careful not to say a word of it to the other servants, as it was a great secret.

"After all there may be two sides to this case, as to others, and Mr. Marston's chief mutiny may have been of that kind which writers of romance and tragedy elevate into heroism.

"He certainly is very much improved."

Here my diary for that day left Mr. Marston, and turned to half-a-dozen trifles, treated, I must admit, with much comparative brevity.

CHAPTER IX.

DANGEROUS GROUND.

OLD Mr. Blount was a religious man. Sir Harry, whose ideas upon such subjects I never could exactly divine, went to church every Sunday; but he scoffed at bishops, and neither loved nor trusted clergymen. He had, however, family prayers every morning, at which good Mr. Blount officiated, with evident happiness and peace in the light of his simple countenance.

No radiance of this happy light was reflected on the face of Sir Harry Rokestone, who sat by the mantelpiece, in one of the old oak arm-chairs, a colossal image of solitude, stern and melancholy, and never,

it seemed to me, so much alone as at those moments which seem to draw other mortals nearer. I fancied that some associations connected with such simple gatherings long ago, perhaps, recalled mamma to his thoughts. He seemed to sit in a stern and melancholy reverie, and he would often come over to me, when the prayer was ended, and, looking at me with great affection, ask gently:

"Well, my little lass, do they try to make you happy here? Is there anything you think of that you'd like me to get down from Lunnon? You must think. I'd like to be doing little things for you; think, and tell me this evening." And at such times he would turn on me a look of full-hearted affection, and smoothe my hair caressingly with his old hand.

Sometimes he would say: "You like this place, you tell me; but the Winters here, I'm thinking, will be too hard for you."

"But I like a good, cold, frosty Winter,"

I would answer him. "There is nothing I think so pleasant."

"Ay, but maybe ye'll be getting a cough or something."

"No, I assure you I'm one of the few persons on earth who never take cold," I urged, for I really wished to spend the Winter at Golden Friars.

"Well, pretty lass, ye shall do as you like best, but you mustn't fall sick; if you do, what's to become o' the auld man?"

You must allow me here to help myself with my diary once more. I am about to quote from what I find there, dated the following Sunday:

"We went to Golden Friars to church as usual; and Mr. Marston, instead of performing his devotions twelve miles away, came with us.

"After the service was ended, Sir Harry, who had a call to make, took leave of us. The day was so fine that we were tempted to walk home instead of driving.

"We chose the path by the lake, and sent the carriage on to Dorracleugh.

"Mr. Blount chooses to talk over the sermon, and I am sure thinks it profane to mention secular subjects on Sunday. I think this a mistake; and I confess I was not sorry when good Mr. Blount stopped and told us he was going into Shenstone's cottage. I felt that a respite of five minutes from the echoes of the good vicar's sermon would be pleasant. But when he went on to say that he was going in to read some of the Bible and talk a little with the consumptive little boy, placing me under Mr. Marston's escort for the rest of the walk, which was about a mile, I experienced a new alarm. I had no wish that Mr. Marston should return to his old heroics.

I did not well know what to say or do, Mr. Blount's good-bye came so suddenly. My making a difficulty about walking home with Mr. Marston would to him, who knew nothing of what had passed at Malory, have

appeared an unaccountable affectation of prudery. I asked Mr. Blount whether he intended staying any time. He answered, 'Half an hour at least; and if the poor boy wishes it, I shall stay an hour,' he added.

"Mr. Marston, who, I am sure, perfectly understood me, did not say a word. I had only to make the best of an uncomfortable situation, and, very nervous, I nodded and smiled my farewell to Mr. Blount, and set out on my homeward march with Mr. Marston.

"I need not have been in such a panic—it was very soon perfectly plain that Mr. Marston did not intend treating me to any heroics.

"'I don't know anyone in the world I have a much higher opinion of than Mr. Blount,' he said; 'but I do think it a great mercy to get away from him a little on Sundays; I can't talk to him in his own way, and I turn simply into a Trappist—I become, I mean, perfectly dumb.'

"I agreed, but said that I had such a regard for Mr. Blount that I could not bring myself to vex him.

"'That is my rule also,' he said, 'only I carry it a little further, ever since I received my education,' he smiled, darkly; 'that is, since I began to suffer, about three years ago, I have learned to practise it with all my friends. You would not believe what constraint I often place upon myself to avoid saying that which is in my heart and next my lips, but which I fear—I fear with too good reason—might not be liked by others. There was a time, I daresay, when Hamlet blurted out everything that came into his mind, before he learned in the school of sorrow to say, "But break my heart, for I must hold my tongue."'

"He looked very expressively, and I thought I knew perfectly what he meant, and that if by any blunder I happened to say a foolish thing, I might find myself, before I knew where I was, in the midst of

a conversation as wild as that of the wood of Plas Ylwd.

"In reply to this I said, not very adroitly:

"'And what a beautiful play *Hamlet* is! I have been trying to copy Retsch's outlines, but I have made such a failure. The faces are so fine and forcible, and the expression of the hands is so wonderful, and my hands are so tame and clumsy; I can do nothing but the ghost, and that is because he is the only absurd figure in the series.'

"'Yes,' he acquiesced, 'like a thing in an *opera bouffe*.'

"I could perceive very plainly that my rather precipitate and incoherent excursion into Retsch's outlines, into which he had followed me with the best grace he could, had wounded him. It was equally plain, however, that he was in good faith practising the rule he had just now mentioned, and was by no means the insolent and overbearing suitor he had shown himself in that

scene, now removed alike by time and distance, in which I had before seen him.

"No one could be more submissive than he to my distinct decision that there was to be no more such wild talk.

"For the rest of our walk he talked upon totally indifferent subjects. Certainly, of the two, I had been the most put out by his momentary ascent to a more tragic level. I wonder now whether I did not possibly suspect a great deal more than was intended. If so, what a fool I must have appeared! Is there anything so ridiculous as a demonstration of resistance where no attack is meditated? I began to feel so confused and ashamed that I hardly took the trouble to follow what he said. As we approached Dorracleugh, however, I began to feel more like myself. After a little silence he said what I am going to set down; I have gone over it again and again in my mind; I know I have added nothing, and I really think I write it very nearly exactly as he spoke it.

"'When I had that strange escape with my life from the *Conway Castle*,' he said, 'no man on earth was more willing and less fit to die than I. I don't suppose there was a more miserable man in England. I had disappointed my uncle by doing what seemed a very foolish thing. I could not tell him my motive—no one knew it—the secret was not mine—everything combined to embarrass and crush me. I had the hardest thing on earth to endure—unmerited condemnation was my portion. Some good people, whom, notwithstanding, I have learned to respect, spoke of me to my face as if I had committed a murder. My uncle understands me now, but he has not yet forgiven me. When I was at Malory, I was in a mood to shoot myself through the head; I was desperate, I was bitter, I was furious. Every unlucky thing that could happen did happen there. The very people who had judged me most cruelly turned up; and among them one who forced a quarrel on

me, and compelled that miserable duel in which I wished at the time I had been killed myself.'

"I listened to all this with more interest than I allowed him to see, as we walked on together side by side, I looking down on the path before us, and saying nothing.

"'If it were not for one or two feelings left me, I should not know myself for the shipwrecked man who thanked his young hostess at Malory for her invaluable hospitality,' he said; 'there are some things one never forgets. I often think of Malory—I have thought of it in all kinds of distant, out-of-the-way, savage places; it rises before me as I saw it last. My life has all gone wrong. While hope remains, we can bear anything—but my last hope seems pretty near its setting—and, when it is out, I hope, seeing I cross and return in all weathers, there is drowning enough in that lake to give a poor fool, at last, a cool head and a quiet heart.'

"Then, without any tragic pause, he turned to other things, lightly, and never looked towards me to discover what effect his words were producing; but he talked on, and now very pleasantly. We loitered a little at the hall-door. I did not want him to come into the drawing-room, and establish himself there. Here were the open door, the hall, the court-yard, the windows, all manner of possibilities for listeners, and I felt I was protected from any embarrassment that an impetuous companion might please to inflict if favoured by a *tête-à-tête.*

"I must, however, do him justice: he seemed very anxious not to offend—very careful so to mask any disclosure of his feelings as to leave me quite free to 'ignore' it, and, as it seemed to me, on the watch to catch any evidence of my impatience.

"He is certainly very agreeable and odd; and the time passed very pleasantly while we loitered in the court-yard.

"Mr. Blount soon came up, and after a word or two I left them, and ran up to my room."

CHAPTER X.

MR. CARMEL TAKES HIS LEAVE.

ABOUT this time there was a sort of fête at Golden Friars. Three very pretty fountains were built by Sir Richard Mardykes and Sir Harry, at the upper end of the town, in which they both have property; and the opening of these was a sort of gala.

I did not care to go. Sir Harry Rokestone and Mr. Blount, were, of course, there; Mr. Marston, went, instead, to his farm, at the other side; and I took a whim to go out on the lake, in a row-boat, in the direction of Golden Friars. My boatmen rowed me near enough to hear the music, which

was very pretty; but we remained sufficiently far out, to prevent becoming mixed up with the other boats which lay near the shore.

It was a pleasant, clear day, with no wind stirring, and although we were now fairly in Winter, the air was not too sharp, and with just a rug about one's feet, the weather was very pleasant. My journal speaks of this evening as follows:

"It was, I think, near four o'clock, when I told the men to row towards Dorracleugh. Before we reached it, the filmy haze of a Winter's evening began to steal over the landscape, and a red sunset streamed through the break in the fells above the town with so lovely an effect that I told the men to slacken their speed. So we moved, with only a dip of the oar, now and then; and I looked up the mere, enjoying the magical effect.

"A boat had been coming, a little in our wake, along the shore. I had observed it,

but without the slightest curiosity; not even with a conjecture that Sir Harry and Mr. Blount might be returning in it, for I knew that it was arranged that they were to come back together in the carriage.

"Voices from this boat caught my ear; and one suddenly that startled me, just as it neared us. It glided up. I fancy about thirty yards were between the sides of the two boats; and the men, like those in my boat, had plainly been ordered merely to dip their oars, and were now moving abreast of ours; the drips from their oars sparkled like drops of molten metal. What I heard—the only thing I now heard—was the harsh nasal voice of Monsieur Droqville.

"There he was, in his black dress, standing in the stern of the boat, looking round on the landscape, from point to point. The light, as he looked this way and that, touched his energetic bronzed features, the folds of his dress, and the wet planks of the boat, with a fire that contrasted

with the grey shadows behind and about.

"I heard him say, pointing with his outstretched arm, 'And is that Dorracleugh?' To which one of the people in the boat made him an answer.

"I can't think of that question without terror. What has brought that man down here? What interest can he have in seeking out Dorracleugh, except that it happens to be my present place of abode?

"I am sure he did not see me. When he looked in my direction, the sun was in his eyes, and my face in shadow; I don't think he can have seen me. But that matters nothing if he has come down for any purpose connected with me."

A sure instinct told me that Monsieur Droqville would be directed inflexibly by the interests of his order, to consult which, at all times, unawed by consequences to himself or others, was his stern and narrow duty.

Here, in this beautiful and sequestered

corner of the world, how far, after all, I had been from quiet? Well might I cry with Campbell's exile—

> Ah! cruel fate, wilt thou never replace me
> In a mansion of peace where no perils can chase me?

My terrors hung upon a secret I dared not disclose. There was no one to help me; for I could consult no one.

The next day I was really ill. I remained in my room. I thought Monsieur Droqville would come to claim an interview; and perhaps would seek, by the power he possessed, to force me to become an instrument in forwarding some of his plans, affecting either the faith or the property of others. I was in an agony of suspense and fear

Days passed; a week; and no sign of Monsieur Droqville. I began to breathe. He was not a man, I knew, to waste weeks, or even days, in search of the picturesque, in a semi-barbarous region like Golden Friars.

At length I summoned courage to speak to Rebecca Torkill. I told her I had seen Monsieur Droqville, and that I wanted her, without telling the servants at Dorracleugh, to make inquiry at the "George and Dragon," whether a person answering that description had been there. No such person was there. So I might assume he was gone. He had come with Sir Richard Mardykes, I conjectured, from Carsbrook, where he often was. But such a man was not likely to make even a pleasure excursion without an eye to business. He had, I supposed, made inquiries; possibly, he had set a watch upon me. Under the eye of such a master of strategy as Monsieur Droqville I could not feel quite at ease.

Nevertheless, in a little time, such serenity as I had enjoyed at Dorracleugh gradually returned; and I enjoyed a routine life, the dulness of which would have been in another state of my spirits insupportable, with very real pleasure.

We were now deep in Winter, and in its snowy shroud how beautiful the landscape looked! Cold, but stimulating and pleasant was the clear, dry air; and our frost-bound world sparkled in the wintry sun.

Old Sir Harry Rokestone, a keen sportsman, proof as granite against cold, was out by moonlight on the grey down with his old-fashioned duck-guns, and, when the lake was not frozen over, with two hardy men manœuvring his boat for him. Town-bred, Mr. Blount contented himself with his brisk walk, stick in hand, and a couple of the dogs for companions to the town; and Mr. Marston was away upon some mission, on which his uncle had sent him, Mr. Blount said, to try whether he was "capable of business and steady."

One night, at this time, as I sat alone in the drawing-room, I was a little surprised to see old Rebecca Torkill come in with her bonnet and cloak on, looking mysterious

and important. Shutting the door, she peeped cautiously round.

"What do you think, miss? Wait—listen," she all but whispered, with her hand raised as she trotted up to my side. "Who do you think I saw, not three minutes ago, at the lime-trees, near the lake?"

I was staring in her face, filled with shapeless alarms.

"I was coming home from Farmer Shenstone's, where I went with some tea for that poor little boy that's ailing, and just as I got over the stile, who should I see, as plain as I see you now, but Mr. Carmel, just that minute got out of his boat, and making as if he was going to walk up to the house. He knew me the minute he saw me—it is a very bright moon—and he asked me how I was; and then how you were, most particular; and he said he was only for a few hours in Golden Friars, and took a boat on the chance of seeing you for a minute, but that he did not know whether you would like

it, and he begged of me to find out and bring him word. If you do, he's waiting down there, Miss Ethel, and what shall I say?"

"Come with me," I said, getting up quickly; and, putting on in a moment my seal-skin jacket and my hat, without another thought or word, much to Rebecca's amazement, I sallied out into the still night air. Turning the corner of the old building, at the end of the court-yard, I found myself treading with rapid steps the crisp grass, under a dazzling moon, and before me the view of the distant fells, throwing their snowy speaks high into the air, with the solemn darkness of the lake, and its silvery gleams below, and the shadowy gorge and great lime-trees in the foreground. Down the gentle slope I walked swiftly, leaving Rebecca Torkill a long way behind.

I was now under the towering lime-trees. I paused: with a throbbing heart I held my breath. I heard hollow steps coming up on

the other side of the file of gigantic stems. I passed between, and saw Mr. Carmel walking slowly towards me. In a moment he was close to me, and took my hand in his old kindly way.

"This is very kind; how can I thank you, Miss Ware? I had hardly hoped to be allowed to call at the house; I am going a long journey, and have not been quite so well as I used to be, and I thought that if I lost this opportunity, in this uncertain world, I might never see my pupil again. I could hardly bear that, without just saying good-bye."

"And you are going?" I said, wringing his hand.

"Yes, indeed; the ocean will be between us soon, and half the world, and I am not to return."

All his kindness rose up before me—his thoughtful goodness, his fidelity—and I felt for a moment on the point of crying.

He was muffled in furs, and was looking

thin and ill, and in the light of the moon the lines of his handsome face were marked as if carved in ivory.

"You and your old tutor have had a great many quarrels, and always made it up again; and now at last we part, I am sure, good friends."

"You are going, and you're ill," was all I could say; but I was conscious there was something of that wild tone that real sorrow gives in my voice.

"How often I have thought of you, Miss Ethel—how often I shall think of you, be my days many or few. How often!"

"I am so sorry, Mr. Carmel—so awfully sorry!" I repeated. I had not unclasped my hand; I was looking in his thin, pale, smiling face with the saddest augury.

"I want you to remember me; it is folly, I know, but it is a harmless folly; all human nature shares in it, and"—there was a little tremble, and a momentary interruption—"and your old tutor, the sage who

lectured you so wisely, is, after all, no less a fool than the rest. Will you keep this little cross? It belonged to my mother, and is, by permission of my superiors, my own, so you may accept it with a clear conscience." He smiled. "If you wear it, or even let it lie upon your table, it will sometimes"—the same momentary interruption occurred again—"it may perhaps remind you of one who took a deep interest in you."

It was a beautiful little gold cross, with five brilliants in it.

"And oh, Ethel! let me look at you once again."

He led me—it was only a step or two—out of the shadow of the tree into the bright moonlight, and, still holding my hand, looked at me intently for a little time with a smile, to me, the saddest that ever mortal face wore.

"And now, here she stands, my wayward, generous, clever Ethel! How proud I was

of my pupil! The heart knoweth its own bitterness," he said gently. "And oh! in the day when our Redeemer makes up his jewels, may you be precious among them! I have seen you; farewell!"

Suddenly he raised my hand, and kissed it gently, twice. Then he turned, and walked rapidly down to the water's edge, and stepped into the boat. The men dipped their oars, and the water rose like diamonds from the touch. I saw his dark figure standing, with arm extended, for a moment, in the stern, in his black cloak, pointing towards Golden Friars. The boat was now three lengths away; twenty—fifty; out on the bosom of the stirless water. The tears that I had restrained burst forth, and sobbing as if my heart would break I ran down to the margin of the lake, and stood upon the broad, flat stone, and waved my hand wildly and unseen towards my friend, whom I knew I was never to see again.

I stood there watching, till the shape of the boat and the sound of the oars were quite lost in the grey distance.

CHAPTER XI.

"LOVE TOOK UP THE GLASS OF TIME."

WEEKS glided by, and still the same clear, bright frost, and low, cold, cheerful suns. The dogs so wild with spirits, the distant sounds travelling so sharp to the ear—ruddy sunsets—early darkness—and the roaring fires at home.

Sir Harry Rokestone's voice, clear and kindly, often heard through the house, calls me from the hall; he wants to know whether "little Ethel" will come out for a ride; or, if she would like a drive with him into the town to see the skaters, for in the shallower parts the mere is frozen.

One day I came into Sir Harry's room, on

some errand, I forget what. Mr. Blount was standing, leaning on the mantelpiece, and Sir Harry was withdrawing a large key from the door of an iron safe, which seemed to be built into the wall. Each paused in the attitude in which I had found him, with his eyes fixed on me, in silence. I saw that I was in their way, and said, a little flurried,

"I'll come again; it was nothing of any consequence," and I was drawing back, when Sir Harry said, beckoning to me with his finger,

"Stay, little Ethel—stay a minute—I see no reason, Blount, why we should not tell the lassie."

Mr. Blount nodded acquiescence.

"Come here, my bonny Ethel," said Sir Harry, and turning the key again in the lock, he pulled the door open. "Look in; ye see that shelf? Well, mind that's where I'll leave auld Harry Rokestone's will—ye'll remember where it lies?"

Then he drew me very kindly to him, smoothed my hair gently with his hand, and said,

"God bless you, my bonny lass!" and kissed me on the forehead.

Then locking the door again, he said,

"Ye'll mind, it's this iron box, that's next the picture. That's all, lassie."

And thus dismissed, I took my departure.

In this retreat, time was stealing on with silent steps. Christmas was past. Mr. Marston had returned; he lived, at this season, more at our side of the lake, and the house was more cheerful.

Can I describe Mr. Marston with fidelity? Can I rely even upon my own recollection of him? What had I become? A dreamer of dreams—a dupe of magic. Everything had grown strangely interesting—the lonely place was lonely no more—the old castle of Dorracleugh was radiant with unearthly light. Unconsciously, I had become the captive of a magician. I had passed under

a sweet and subtle mania, and was no longer myself. Little by little, hour by hour, it grew, till I was transformed. Well, behold me now, wildly in love with Richard Marston.

Looking back now on that period of my history, I see plainly enough that it was my inevitable fate. So much together, and surrounded by a solitude, we were the only young people in the little group which formed our society. Handsome and fascinating —wayward, and even wicked he might have been, but that I might hope was past—he was energetic, clever, passionate; and of his admiration he never allowed me to be doubtful.

My infatuation had been stealing upon me, but it was not until we had reached the month of May that it culminated in a scene that returns again and again in my solitary reveries, and always with the same tumult of sweet and bitter feelings.

On the day before that explanation took

place, my diary, from which I have often quoted, says thus:

"May 9th.—There was no letter, I am sure, by the early post from Mr. Marston; Sir Harry or Mr. Blount would have been sure to talk of it at breakfast. It is treating his uncle, I think, a little cavalierly.

"Sailed across the lake to-day, alone, to Clusted, and walked about a quarter of a mile up the forest road. How beautiful everything is looking, but how melancholy! When last I saw this haunted wood, Sir Harry Rokestone and Mr. Marston were with me.

"It seems odd that Mr. Marston stays away so long, and hard to believe that if he tried he might not have returned sooner. He went on the 28th of April, and Mr. Blount thought he would be back again in a week: that would have been on the 5th of this month. I daresay he is glad to get away for a little time—I cannot blame him; I dare say he finds it often very dull, say

what he will. I wonder what he meant, the other day, when he said he was 'born to be liked least where he loved most'? He seems very melancholy. I wonder whether there has been some old love and parting? Why, unless he liked some one else, should he have quarrelled with Sir Harry, rather than marry as he wished him? Sir Harry would not have chosen anyone for him who was not young and good-looking. I heard him say something one morning that showed his opinion upon that point; and young men, who don't like anyone in particular, are easily persuaded to marry. Well, perhaps his constancy will be rewarded; it is not likely that the young lady should have given him up.

"May 10th.—How shall I begin? What have I done? Heaven forgive me if I have done wrong! Oh! kind, true friend, Sir Harry, how have I requited you? It is too late now—the past is past. And yet, in spite of this, how happy I am!

"Let me collect my thoughts, and write down as briefly as I can an outline of the events of this happy, agitating day. No lovelier May day was ever seen. I was enjoying a lonely saunter, about one o'clock, under the boughs of Lynder Wood, here and there catching the gleam of the waters through the trees, and listening from time to time to the call of the cuckoo from the hollows of the forest. In that lonely region there is no more lonely path than this.

"On a sudden, I heard a step approaching fast from behind me on the path, and, looking back, I saw Mr. Marston coming on, with a very glad smile, to overtake me. I stopped; I felt myself blushing. He was speaking as he approached: I was confused, and do not recollect what he said; but hardly a moment passed till he was at my side. He was smiling, but very pale. I suppose he had made up his mind to speak. He did not immediately talk of the point on which hung so much; he spoke of other

things—I can recollect nothing of them.

"He began at length to talk upon that other theme that lay so near our hearts; our pace grew slower and slower as he spoke on, until we came to a stand-still under the great beech-tree, on whose bark our initials, now spread by time and touched with lichen, but possibly still legible, are carved.

"Well, he has spoken, and I have answered—I can't remember our words; but we are betrothed in the sight of Heaven by vows that nothing can ever cancel, till those holier vows, plighted at the altar-steps, are made before God himself, or until either shall die.

"Oh! Richard, my love, and is it true? Can it be that you love your poor Ethel with a love so tender, so deep, so desperate? He has loved me, he says, ever since he first saw me, on the day after his escape, in the garden at Malory!

"I liked him from the first. In spite of

all their warnings, I could not bring myself to condemn or distrust him long. I never forgot him during the years we have been separated; he has been all over the world since, and often in danger, and I have suffered such great and unexpected changes of fortune—to think of our being brought together at last! Has not Fate ordained it?

"The only thing that darkens the perfect sunshine of to-day is that our attachment and engagement must be a secret. He says so, and I am sure he knows best. He says that Sir Harry has not half forgiven him yet, and that he would peremptorily forbid our engagement. He could unquestionably effect our separation, and make us both inexpressibly miserable. But when I look at Sir Harry's kind, melancholy face, and think of all he has done for me, my heart upbraids me, and to-night I had to turn hastily away, for my eyes filled suddenly with tears."

CHAPTER XII.

AN AWKWARD PROPOSAL.

I WILL here make a few extracts more from my diary, because they contain matters traced there merely in outline, and of which it is more convenient to present but a skeleton account.

"May 11th.—Richard went early to his farm to-day. I told him last night that I would come down to see him off this morning. But he would not hear of it; and again enjoined the greatest caution. I must do nothing to induce the least suspicion of our engagement, or even of our caring for each other. I must not tell Rebecca Torkill a word about it, nor hint it to anyone of

the few friends I correspond with. I am sure he is right; but this secrecy is very painful. I feel so treacherous, and so sad, when I see Sir Harry's kind face.

"Richard was back at three o'clock; we met by appointment, in the same path, in Lynder Wood. He has told me ever so much, of which I knew nothing before. Mr. Blount told him, he says, that Sir Harry means to leave me an annuity of two hundred a year. How kind and generous! I feel more than ever the pain and meanness of my reserve. He intends to leave Richard eight hundred a year, and the farm at the other side of the lake. Richard thinks, if he had not displeased him, he would have done more for him. All this, that seems to me very noble, depends, however, upon his continuing to like us, as he does at present. Richard says that he will settle everything he has in the world upon me. It hurts me, his thinking me so mercenary, and talking so soon upon the subject of money and settle-

ments; I let him see this, for the idea of his adding to what my benefactor Sir Harry intended for me had not entered my mind.

"'It is just, my darling, because you are so little calculating for yourself that I must look a little forward for you,' he said, and so tenderly. 'Whose business is it now to think of such things for you, if not mine? And you won't deny me the pleasure of telling you that I can prevent, thank Heaven, some of the dangers you were so willing to encounter for my sake.'

"Then he told me that the bulk of Sir Harry's property is to go to people not very nearly related to him, called Strafford; and he gave me a great charge not to tell a word of all this to a living creature, as it would involve him in a quarrel with Mr. Blount, who had told him Sir Harry's intentions under the seal of secrecy.

"I wish I had not so many secrets to keep; but his goodness to me makes me love Sir Harry better every day. I told

him all about Sir Harry's little talk with me about his will. I can have no secrets now from Richard."

For weeks, for months, this kind of life went on, eventless, but full of its own hopes, misgivings, agitations. I loved Golden Friars for many reasons, if things so light as associations and sentiments can so be called —founded they were, however, in imagination and deep affection. One of these was and is that my darling mother is buried there; and the simple and sad inscription on her monument, in the pretty church, is legible on the wall opposite the Rokestone pew.

"That's a kind fellow, the vicar," said Sir Harry; "a bit too simple; but if other sirs were like him, there would be more folk in the church to hear the sermon!"

When Sir Harry made this speech, he and I were sitting in the boat, the light evening air hardly filled the sails, and we were tacking slowly back and forward on the mere, along the shore of Golden Friars.

It was a beautiful evening in August, and the little speech and our loitering here were caused by the sweet music that pealed from the organ through the open church windows. The good old vicar was a fine musician; and often in the long Summer and Autumn evenings, the lonely old man visited the organ-loft and played those sweet and solemn melodies that so well accorded with the dreamlike scene.

It was the music that recalled the vicar to Sir Harry's thoughts—but his liking for him was not all founded upon that, nor even upon his holy life and kindly ways. It was this: that when he read the service at mamma's funeral, the white-haired vicar, who remembered her a beautiful child, wept—and tears rolled down his old cheeks as with upturned eyes he repeated the noble and pathetic farewell.

When it was over, Sir Harry, who had had a quarrel with the vicar before, came over and shook him by the hand, heartily

and long, speaking never a word—his heart was too full. And from that time he liked him, and did not know how to show it enough.

In these long, lazy tacks, sweeping slowly by the quaint old town in silence, broken only by the ripple of the water along the planks, and the sweet and distant swell of the organ across the water, the time flew by. The sun went down in red and golden vapours, and the curfew from the ivied tower of Golden Friars sounded over the darkened lake—the organ was heard no more—and the boat was now making her slow way back again to Dorracleugh.

Sir Henry looked at me very kindly, in silence, for awhile. He arranged a rug about my feet, and looked again in my face.

"Sometimes you look so like bonny Mabel—and when you smile—ye mind her smile? 'Twas very pretty."

Then came a silence.

"I must tell Renwick, when the shooting

begins, to send down a brace of birds every day to the vicar," said Sir Harry. "I'll be away myself in a day or two, and I shan't be back again for three weeks. I'll take a house in London, lass—I won't have ye moping here too long—you'd begin to pine for something to look at, and folk to talk to, and sights to see."

I was alarmed, and instantly protested that I could not imagine any life more delightful than this at Golden Friars.

"No, no; it won't do—you're a good lass to say so—but it's not the fact—oh, no—it isn't natural—I can't take you to balls, and all that, for I don't know the people that give them—and all my great lady friends that I knew when I was a younker, are off the hooks by this time—but there's plenty of sights to see besides—there's the waxworks, and the wild beasts, and the players, and the pictures, and all the shows."

"But I assure you, I like Golden Friars, and my quiet life at Dorracleugh, a thou-

sand times better than all the sights and wonders in the world," I protested.

If he had but known half the terror with which I contemplated the possibility of my removal from my then place of abode, he would have given me credit for sincerity in my objections to our proposed migration to the capital.

"No, I say, it won't do; you women can't bring yourselves ever to say right out to us men what you think; you mean well—you're a good little thing—you don't want to put the auld man out of his way—but you'd like Lunnon best, and Lunnon ye shall have. You shall have a house you can see your auld acquaintance in, such, I mean, as showed themselves good-natured when all went wrong wi' ye. You shall show them ye can haud your head as high as ever, and are not a jot down in the world. Never mind, I have said it."

In vain I protested; Sir Harry continued firm. One comfort was that he would not

return to put his threat into execution for, at least, three weeks. If anything was wanting to complete my misery, it was Sir Harry's saying, after a little silence,

"And see, lass; don't you tell a word of it to Richard Marston; 'twould only make him fancy I'm going to take him; and I'd as lief take the devil—so mind ye, it's a secret."

I smiled as well as I could, and said something that seemed to satisfy him, or he took it for granted, for he went on and talked, being much more communicative this evening than usual; while my mind was busy with the thought of a miserable separation, and all the difficulties of correspondence that accompany a secret engagement.

So great was the anguish of these anticipations that I hazarded one more effort to induce him to abandon his London plans, and to let me continue to enjoy my present life at Dorracleugh.

He was, however, quite immovable; he

laughed; he told me, again and again, that it would not "put him out of his way—not a bit;" and he added, "You're falling into a moping, unnatural life, and you've grown to like it, and the more you like it, the less it is fit for you; if you lose your spirits, you can't keep your health long."

And when I still persisted, he looked in my face a little darkly, on a sudden, as if a doubt as to my motive had crossed his mind. That look frightened me. I felt that matters might be worse.

Sir Harry had got it into his head, I found, that my health would break down, unless he provided the sort of change and amusement which he had decided on. I don't know to which of the wiseacres of Golden Friars I was obliged for this crotchet, which promised me such an infinity of suffering, but I had reason to think, afterwards, that old Miss Goulding of Wrybiggins was the friend who originated these misgivings about my health

and spirits. She wished, I was told, to marry her niece to Richard Marston, and thought, if I and Sir Harry were out of the way, her plans would act more smoothly.

Richard was at home—it was our tea-time—I had not an opportunity of saying a word to him unobserved. I don't know whether he saw by my looks that I was unhappy.

CHAPTER XIII.

DANGER.

SIR HARRY took his coffee with us, and read to me a little now and then from the papers which had come by the late mails. Mr. Blount had farming news to tell Richard. It was a dreadful tea-party.

I was only able that night to appoint with Richard to meet me, next day, at our accustomed trysting-place.

Three o'clock was our hour of meeting. The stupid, feverish day dragged on, and the time at length arrived. I got on my things quickly, and trembling lest I should be joined by Sir Harry or Mr.

Blount, I betook myself through the orchard, and by the wicket in the hedge, to the lonely path through the thick woods where we had, a few months since, plighted our troth.

Richard appeared very soon ; he was approaching by the path opposite to that by which I had come.

The foliage was thick and the boughs hang low in that place. You could have fancied him a figure walking in the narrow passage of a monastery, so dark and well-defined is the natural roofing of the pathway there. He raised his open hand, and shook his head as he drew near ; he was not smiling ; he looked very sombre.

He glanced back over his shoulder, and looked sharply down the path I had come by, and being now very near me, with another gloomy shake of the head, he said, with a tone and look of indescribable reproach and sorrow ; "So Ethel has her secrets, and tells me but half her mind."

"What can you mean, Richard?"

"Ah! Ethel, I would not have treated you so," he continued.

"You distract me, Richard; what have I done?"

"I have heard it all by accident, I may say, from old Mr. Blount, who has been simpleton enough to tell me. You have asked my uncle to take you to London, and you are going."

"Asked him! I have all but implored of him to leave me here. I never heard a word of it till last night, as we returned together in the boat. Oh! Richard, how could you think such things? That is the very thing I have been so longing to talk to you about."

"Ethel, darling, are you opening your heart entirely to me now; is there no reserve? No; I am sure there is not; you need not answer."

"It is distracting news; is there nothing we can do to prevent it?" I said.

He looked miserable enough, as walking slowly along the path, and sometimes standing still, we talked it over.

"Yes," he said; "the danger is that you may lead him by resistance to look for some secret motive. If he should suspect our engagement, few worse misfortunes could befall us. Good heavens! shall I ever have a quiet home? Ethel, I know what will happen—you will go to London; I shall be forgotten. It will end in the ruin of all my hopes." So he raved on.

I wept, and upbraided, and vowed my old vows over again.

At length after this tempestuous scene had gone on for some time, we two walking side by side up and down the path, and sometimes stopping short, I crying, if you will, like a fool, he took my hand and looked in my face very sadly, and he said after a little:

"Only I know that he would show more anger, I should have thought that my uncle

knew of our engagement, and was acting expressly to frustrate it. He has found work for me at his property near Hull, and from that I am to go to Warwickshire, so that I suppose I can't be here again before the middle of October, and long before then you will be at Brighton, where, Mr. Blount says, he means to take you first, and from that to London."

"But you are not to leave this immediately?" I said.

He smiled bitterly, and answered:

"He takes good care I shall. I am to leave this to-morrow morning."

I could not speak for a moment.

"Oh, Richard, Richard, how am I to live through this separation?" I cried wildly. "You must contrive some way to see me. I shall die unless you do."

"Come, Ethel, let us think it over; it seems to me that we have nothing for it, for the present, but submission. I am perfectly certain that our attachment is not suspected.

If it were, far more cruel and effectual measures would be taken. We must, therefore, be cautious. Let us betray nothing of our feelings. You shall see me undergo the ordeal with the appearance of carelessness, and even cheerfulness, although my heart be bursting. You, darling, must do the same; one way or other I will manage to see you sometimes, and to correspond regularly. We are bound each to the other by promises we dare not break, and when I desert you, may God desert me! Ethel, will you say the same?"

"Yes, Richard," I repeated, vehemently, through sobs, "when I forsake you, may God forsake me! You know I could not live without you. Oh! Richard, darling, how shall I see you all this evening, knowing it to be the last? How can I look at you, or hear your voice, and yet no sign, and talk or listen just as usual, as if nothing had gone wrong? Richard, is there no way to escape? Do you think if we told your

uncle? Might it not be the best thing after all? Could it possibly make matters worse?"

"Yes, it would, a great deal worse; that is not to be thought of," said Richard, with a thoughtful frown; "I know him better than you do. No; we have nothing for it but patience, and entire trust in one another. As for me, if I am away from you, the more solitary I am, the more bearable my lot. With you it will be different; you will soon be in the stream and whirl of your old life. I shall lose you, Ethel." He stamped on the ground, and struck his forehead with his open hand in sheer distraction. "As for me, I can enjoy nothing without you; I may have been violent, wicked, reckless, what you will; but selfish or fickle, no one ever called me."

I was interrupting him all the time with my passionate vows of fidelity, which he seemed hardly to hear; he was absorbed in his own

thoughts. After a silence of a minute or two, he said, suddenly:

"Look here, Ethel; if you don't like your London life, you can't be as well there as here, and you can, if you will, satisfy my uncle that you are better, as well as happier, here at Golden Friars. You can do that, and that is the way to end it—the only way to end it that I see. You can write to me, Ethel, without danger. You will, I know, every day, just a line; and when you tell me how to address mine, you shall have an answer by every post. Don't go out in London, Ethel; you must promise that."

I did, vehemently and reproachfully. I wondered how he could suspect me of wishing to go out. But I could not resent the jealousy that proved his love.

It was, I think, just at this moment that I heard a sound that made my heart bound within me, and then sink with terror. It was the clear, deep voice of Sir Harry, so

near that it seemed a step must bring him round the turn in the path, and full in view of us.

"Go, darling, quickly," said Richard, pressing me gently with one hand, and with the other pointing in the direction furthest from the voice that was so near a signal of danger. He himself turned, and walked quickly to meet Sir Harry, who was conferring with his ranger about thinning the timber.

I was out of sight in a moment, and, in agitation indescribable, made my way home.

CHAPTER XIV.

AN INTRUDER.

IT was all true. Richard left Dorracleugh early next morning. Those who have experienced such a separation know its bitterness, and the heartache and apathy that follow.

I was going to be left quite alone, and mistress at Dorracleugh for three weeks at least; perhaps for twice as long. Mr. Blount was to leave next day for France, to pay a visit of a fortnight to Vichy. Sir Harry Rokestone, a few days later, was to leave Dorracleugh for Brighton.

Nothing could be kinder than Sir Harry.

It was plain that he suspected nothing of the real situation.

"You'll be missing your hit of back-gammon with Lemuel Blount," he said, "and your sail on the mere wi' myself, and our talk round the tea-table of an evening. 'Twill be dowly down here, lass; but ye'll be coming soon where you'll see sights and hear noise enough for a dozen. So think o' that, and when we are gone you munnon be glumpin' about the house, but chirp up, and think there are but a few weeks between you and Brighton and Lunnon."

How directly this kind consolation went to the source of my dejection you may suppose.

So the time came, and I was alone. Solitude was a relief. I could sit looking at the lake, watching the track where his boat used to come and go over the water, and thinking of him half the day. I could walk in the pathway, and sit under the old beech-tree, and murmur long talks with him in

fancy, without fear of interruption; but oh! the misgivings, the suspense, the dull, endless pain of separation!

Not a line reached me from Richard. He insisted that while I remained at Dorracleugh there should be no correspondence. In Golden Friars, and about the post-office, there were so many acute ears and curious eyes.

Sir Harry had been gone about three weeks, when he sent me a really exquisite little enamelled watch, set in brilliants; it was brought to Dorracleugh by a Golden Friars neighbour whom he had met in his travels. Then, after a silence of a week, another letter came from Sir Harry. He was going up to London, he said, to see after the house, and to be sure that nothing was wanting to "make it smart."

Then some more days of silence followed, interrupted very oddly. I was out, taking my lonely walk in the afternoon, when a chaise with a portmanteau, a hat-box, and

some other luggage on top, drove up to the hall-door; the driver knocked and rang, and out jumped Richard Marston, who ran up the steps, and asked the servant, with an accustomed air of command, to take his luggage up to his room.

He had been some minutes in the hall before he inquired whether I was in the house. He sat down on a hall-chair, in his hat and great-coat, just as he had come out of the chaise, lost in deep thought. He seemed for a time undecided where to go; he went to the foot of the stairs, and stopped short, with his hand on the banister, and turned back; then he stood for a little while in the middle of the hall, looking down on his dusty boots, again in deep thought; then he walked to the hall-door, stood on the steps in the same undecided state, and sauntered in again, and said to the servant:

"And Miss Ware, you say, is out walking? Well, go you and tell the housekeeper that I have come, and shall be coming and

going for a few days, till I hear from London."

The man departed to execute his message. Richard Marston had paid the vicar a visit of about five minutes, as he drove through the town of Golden Friars, and had had a very private and earnest talk with him. He seemed very uncomfortable and fidgety. He took off his hat and laid it down, and put it on again, and looked dark and agitated, like a man in sudden danger, who expects a struggle for his life. He went again to the foot of the stairs, and listened for a few seconds; and then, without more ado, he walked over and turned the key that was in Sir Harry's study-door, took it out, and went into the room, looking very stern and nervous.

In a little more than five minutes Mrs. Shackleton, the housekeeper, in her thick brown silk, knocked sharply at the door.

"Come in," called Richard Marston's voice.

"I can't, sir."

"Can't? Why? What's the matter?"

"You've bolted it, please, on the inside," she answered, very tartly.

"I? I haven't bolted it," Richard Marston answered, with a quiet laugh. "Try again."

She did, a little fiercely; but the door opened, and disclosed Richard Marston sitting in his uncle's easy-chair, with one of the newspapers he had bought in his railway carriage expanded on his knees. He looked up carelessly.

"Well, Mrs. Shackleton, what's the row?"

"No row, sir, please," she answered, sharply rustling into the room, and looking round. She didn't like him. "But the door was bolted, I assure you, sir, only a minute before, when I tried it first; and my master, Sir Harry, told me no one was to be allowed into this room while he's away."

"So I should have thought; his letters lying about—but I found the door open,

and the key in the lock—here it is; so I thought it safer to take it out."

The old woman made a short curtsey as she took it, dryly, from his fingers; and she stood, resolutely waiting.

"Oh! I suppose," he said, starting up, and stretching himself, with a smile and a little yawn, "you want to turn me out?"

"Yes, sir, please," said Mrs. Shackleton peremptorily.

The young gentleman cast a careless glance through the far window, looked lazily round, as if to see that he had not forgotten anything, and then said, with a smile:

"Mrs. Shackleton, happy the man who has such a lady to take care of his worldly goods."

"I'm no lady, sir; I'm not above my business," she said, with another hard little curtsey. "I tries to do my dooty accordin' to my conscience. Sorry to have to disturb you, sir."

"Not the least; no disturbance," he said,

sauntering out of the room, with another yawn.

He was cudgelling his brains to think what civility he could do the old lady, or how he could please or make her friendly; but Mrs. Shackleton had her northern pride, he knew, which was easily ruffled, and he must approach her very cautiously.

CHAPTER XV.

SIR HARRY'S KEY.

UP to his room he went; his things were all there—he wished to get rid of the dust and smuts of his railway journey.

He made his toilet rapidly; and just as he was about to open his door, a knock came to it.

"What is it?" he asked.

"The vicar has called, sir, and wants to know if you can see him."

"Certainly. Tell him I'll be down in a moment."

Mr. Marston had foreseen this pursuit with a prescience of which he was proud. He went down-stairs, and found the white-haired vicar alone in the drawing-room.

"I am so delighted you have come," said Richard Marston, advancing quickly, with an outstretched hand, from the door, without giving him a moment to begin. "I have only had time to dress since I arrived, and I have made up my mind that it is better to replace this key in your hand, without using it—and, in the meantime, it is better in your keeping than in mine. Don't you think so?"

"Well, sir," said the good vicar, "I do. It is odd, but the very same train of thought passed through my mind, and, in fact, induced me to pay you this visit. You see it was placed in my charge, and I think, until it is formally required of me, I should not part with it."

"Just so," acquiesced the young man.

"We both acted, perhaps, a little too precipitately."

"So we did, sir," said Richard Marston, "but I take the entire blame on myself. I'm too apt to be impulsive and foolish. I

generally think too late; happily this time, however, I did reflect, and with your concurrence, I am now sure I was right."

The young man paused and thought, with his hand on the vicar's arm.

"One thing," he said, "I would stipulate, however; as we are a good deal in the dark, my reason for declining to take charge of the key would be but half answered, as I must be a great deal in this house, and there may be other keys that open it, and I can't possibly answer for servants, and other people who will be coming and going, unless you will kindly come into the next room with me for a moment."

The vicar consented; and Mr. Marston was eloquent. Mrs. Shackelton was sent for, and with less reluctance opened the door for the vicar, whom she loved. She did not leave it, however—they did not stay long. In a few minutes the party withdrew.

"Won't you have some luncheon?" asked Richard, in the hall.

"No, thank you," said the vicar, "I am very much hurried. I am going to see that poor boy to whom Mr. Blount has been so kind, and who is, I fear, dying."

And with a few words more, and the key again in his keeping, he took his leave.

I was all this time in my favourite haunt, alone, little thinking that the hero of my dreams was near, when suddenly I saw him walking rapidly up the path. With a cry, I ran to meet him. He seemed delighted and radiant with love as he drew me to him, folded me for a moment in his arms, and kissed me passionately. He had ever so much to say; and yet, when I thought it over, there was nothing in it but one delightful promise; and that was that, henceforward, he expected to see a great deal more of me than he had hitherto done.

There was a change in his manner, I thought—he spoke with something of the confidence and decision of a lover who had a right to command. He was not more

earnest, but more demonstrative. I might have resented his passionate greeting, if I had been myself less surprised and happy at his sudden appearance. He was obliged to go down to the village, but would be back again, he said, very soon. It would not do to make people talk, which they would be sure to do, if he and I were not very cautious.

Therefore I let him go, without entreaty or remonstrance, although it cost me an indescribable pang to lose him, even for an hour, so soon after our long separation. He promised to be back in an hour, and although that was nearly impracticable, I believed him. "Lovers trample upon impossibilities."

By a different route I came home. He had said:

"When I return, I shall come straight to the drawing-room—will you be there?"

So to the drawing-room I went. I was afraid to leave it even for a moment, lest

some accident should make him turn back, and he should find the room empty. There was to me a pleasure in obeying him, and I liked him to see it. How I longed for his return! How restless I was! How often I played his favourite airs on the piano; how often I sat at the window, looking down at the trees and the mere, in the direction from which I had so often seen his boat coming, you will easily guess.

All this time I had a secret misgiving. There was a change in Richard's manner, as I have said; there was confidence, security, carelessness—a kind of carelessness—not that he seemed to admire me less—but it was a change. There seemed something ominous about it.

As time wore on I became so restless that I could hardly remain quiet for a minute in any one place. I was perpetually holding the door open, and listening for the sound of horses' hoofs, or wheels, or footsteps. In vain.

An hour beyond the appointed time had passed; two hours. I was beginning to fancy all sorts of horrors. Was he drowned in the mere? Had his horse fallen and killed him? There was no catastrophe too improbable to be canvassed among the wild conjectures of my terror.

The sun was low, and I almost despairing, when the door opened, and Richard came in. I had heard no sound at the door, no step approaching, only he was there.

CHAPTER XVI.

A DISCOVERY.

I STARTED to my feet and was going to meet him, but he raised his hand, as I fancied to warn me that some one was coming. So I stopped short, and he approached.

"I shall be very busy for two or three days, dear Ethel; and," what he added was spoken very slowly, and dropped word by word, "you are such a rogue!"

I was very much astonished. Neither his voice nor look was playful. His face at the moment wore about the most disagreeable expression which human face can wear.

That of a smile, not a genuine but a pretended smile, which, at the same time, the person who smiles affects to try to suppress. To me it looks cruel, cynical, mean. I was so amazed, as he looked into my eyes with this cunning, shabby smile, that I could not say a word, and stood stock-still looking in return, in stupid wonder, in his face.

At lenght I broke out, very pale, for I was shocked, "I can't understand! What is it? Oh, Richard, what can you mean?"

"Now don't be a little fool. I really believe you are going to cry. You are a great deal too clever, you lovely little rogue, to fancy that a girl's tears ever yet did any good. Listen to me; come!"

He walked away, still smiling that insulting smile, and he took my hand in his, and shook his finger at me, with the same cynical affectation of the playful. "What do I mean?"

"Yes, what can you mean?" I stamped the emphasis on the floor, with tears in my

eyes. "It is cruel, it is horrible, after our long separation."

"Well, I'll tell you what I mean," he said, and for a moment the smile almost degenerated to a sneer. "Look here; come to the window."

I faltered; I accompanied him to it, looking in his face in an agony of alarm and surprise. It seemed to me like the situation of a horrid dream.

"Do you know how I amused myself during the last twenty miles of my railway journey?" he said. "Well, I'll tell you: I was reading all that time a curious criminal trial, in which a most respectable old gentleman, aged sixty-seven, has just been convicted of having poisoned a poor girl forty years ago, and is to be hanged for it before three weeks!"

"Well?" said I, with an effort—I should not have known my own voice, and I felt a great ball in my throat.

"Well?" he repeated; "don't you see?"

He paused with the same horrid smile; this time, in the silence, he laughed a little; it was no use trying to hide from myself the fact that I dimly suspected what he was driving at. I should have liked to die that moment, before he had time to complete another sentence.

"Now, you see, the misfortune of that sort of thing is that time neither heals nor hides the offence. There is a principle of law which says that no lapse of time bars the Crown. But I see this kind of conversation bores you."

I was near saying something very wild and foolish, but I did not.

"I won't keep you a moment," said he—"just come a little nearer the window; I want you to look at something that may interest you."

I did go a little nearer. I was moving as he commanded, as if I had been mesmerised.

"You lost," he continued, "shortly before your illness, the only photograph you

possessed of your sister Helen? But why are you so put out by it? Why should you tremble so violently? It is only I, you know; you need not mind. You dropped that on the floor of a jeweller's shop one night, when I and Droqville happened to be there together, and I picked it up; it represents you both together. I want to restore it; here it is."

I extended my hand to take it. I don't know whether I spoke, but the portrait faded suddenly from my sight, and darkness covered everything. I heard his voice, like that of a person talking in excitement, a long way off, at the other side of a wall in another room—it was no more than a hum, and even that was growing fainter. I forgot everything, in utter unconsciousness, for some seconds. When I opened my eyes, water was trickling down my face and forehead, and the window was open. I sighed deeply. I saw him looking over me with a countenance of gloom and anxiety. In hap-

py forgetfulness of all that had passed, I smiled and said:

"Oh, Richard! Thank God!" and stretched my arms to him.

"That's right—quite right," he said; "you may have every confidence in me."

The dreadful recollection began to return.

"Don't get up yet," he said, earnestly, and even tenderly; "you're not equal to it. Don't think of leaving me—you must have confidence in me. Why didn't you trust me long ago?—trust me altogether? Fear nothing while I am near you."

So he continued speaking, until my recollection had quite returned.

"Why, darling, will you not trust me? Can you be surprised at my being wounded by your reserve? How have I deserved it? Forget the pain of this discovery, and remember only that against all the world, to the last hour of my life, with my last thought, the last drop of my blood, I am your defender."

He kissed my hands passionately; he drew me towards him, and kissed my lips. He murmured caresses and vows of unalterable love—nothing could be more tender and impassioned. I was relieved by a passionate burst of tears.

"It's over now," he said—"it's all over; you'll forgive me, won't you? I have more to forgive, darling, than you—the hardest of all things to forgive in one whom we idolise—a want of confidence in us. You ought to have told me all this before."

I told him, as well as I could between my sobs, that there was no need to tell any one of a madness which had nothing to do with waking thoughts or wishes, and was simply the extravagance of delirium—that I was then actually in fever, had been at the point of death, and that Mr. Carmel knew everything about it.

"Well, darling," he said, "you must trouble your mind no more. Of course you are not accountable for it. If people in brain-

fever were not carefully watched and restrained, a day would not pass without some tragedy. But what care I, Ethel, if it had been a real crime of passion? Nothing. Do you fancy it would or could, for an instant, have shaken my desperate love for you? Don't you remember Moore's lines:

> "I ask not, I care not, if guilt's in thy heart;
> I but know that thou lov'st me, whatever thou art."

That is my feeling, fixed as adamant; never suspect me. I can't, I never can, tell you how I felt your suspicion of my love; how cruel I thought it. What had I done to deserve it? There, darling, take this—it is yours." He kissed the little photograph, he placed it in my hand, he kissed me again fervently. "Look here, Ethel, I came all this way, ever so much out of my way, to see you. I made an excuse of paying the vicar a visit on business—my real business was to see you. I must be this evening at Wrexham, but I shall be here again tomorrow, as early as possible. I am a mere

slave at present, and business hurries me from point to point; but cost what it may, I shall be with you some time in the afternoon to-morrow."

"To stay?" I asked.

He smiled, and shook his head.

"I can't say that, darling," he said; he was going towards the door.

"But you'll be here early to-morrow; do you think before two?"

"No, not before two, I am afraid. I may be delayed, and it is a long way; but you may look out for me early in the evening."

Then came a leave-taking. He would not let me come with him to the hall-door—there were servants there, and I looked so ill. I stood at the window and saw him drive away. You may suppose I did feel miserable. I think I was near fainting again when he was gone.

In a little time I was sufficiently recovered to get up to my room, and then I rang for Rebecca Torkill.

I don't know how that long evening went by. The night came, and a miserable nervous night I passed, starting in frightful dreams from the short dozes I was able to snatch.

CHAPTER XVII.

SIR HARRY WITHDRAWS.

NEXT morning, when the grey light came, I was neither glad nor sorry. The shock of my yesterday's interview with the only man on earth I loved, remained. It was a shock, I think, never to be quite recovered from. I got up and dressed early. How ill and strange I looked out of the glass in my own face!

I did not go down. I remained in my room, loitering over the hours that were to pass before the arrival of Richard. I was haunted by his changed face. I tried to fix in my recollection the earnest look of love

on which my eyes had opened from my swoon. But the other would take its place and remain; and I could not get rid of the startled pain of my heart. I was haunted now, as I had been ever since that scene had taken place, with a vague misgiving of something dreadful going to happen.

I think it was between four and five in the evening that Rebecca Torkill came in, looking pale and excited.

"Oh, Miss Ethel, dear, what do you think has happened?" she said, lifting up both hands and eyes as soon as she was in at the door.

"Good Heaven, Rebecca!" I said, starting up; "is it anything bad?"

I was on the point of saying "anything about Mr. Marston?"

"Oh, miss! what do you think? Poor Sir Harry Rokestone is dead."

"Sir Harry dead!" I exclaimed.

"Dead, indeed, miss," said Rebecca. "Thomas Byres is just come up from the

vicar's, and he's had a letter from Mr. Blount this morning, and the vicar's bin down at the church with Dick Mattox, the sexton, giving him directions about the vault. Little thought I, when I saw him going away—a fine man he was, six feet two, Adam Bell says, in his boots—little thought I, when I saw him walk down the steps, so tall and hearty, he'd be coming back so soon in his coffin, poor gentleman. But, miss, they say dead folk's past feeling, and what does it all matter now? One man's breath is another man's death. And so the world goes on, and all forgot before long.

> "To the grave with the dead,
> And the quick to the bread."

A rough gentleman he was, but kind—the tenants will be all sorry. They're all talking, the servants, down-stairs. He was one that liked to see his tenants and his poor comfortable."

All this and a great deal more Rebecca

discoursed. I could hardly believe her news. A letter, I thought, would have been sure to reach Dorracleugh, as soon as the vicar's house, at least.

Possibly this dismaying news would turn out to be mere rumour, I thought, and end in nothing worse than a sharp attack of gout in London. Surely we should have heard of his illness before it came to such a catastrophe. Nevertheless I had to tear up my first note to the vicar—I was so flurried, and it was so full of blunders—and I was obliged to write another. It was simply to entreat information in this horrible uncertainty, which had for the time superseded all my other troubles.

A mounted messenger was despatched forthwith to the vicar's house. But we soon found that the rumour was everywhere, for people were arriving from all quarters to inquire at the house. It was, it is true, so far as we could learn, mere report;

but its being in so many places was worse than ominous.

The messenger had not been gone ten minutes, when Richard Marston arrived. From my room I saw the chaise come to the hall-door, and I ran down at once to the drawing-room. Richard had arrived half an hour before his time. He entered the room from the other door as I came in, and met me eagerly, looking tired and anxious, but very loving. Not a trace of the Richard whose smile had horrified me the day before.

Almost my first question to him was whether he had heard any such rumour. He was holding my hand in his as I asked the question—he laid his other on it, and looked sadly in my eyes as he answered, "It is only too true. I have lost the best friend that man ever had."

I was too much startled to speak for some seconds, then I burst into tears.

"No, no," he said, in answer to something I had said. "It is only too certain—there can be no doubt; look at this."

He took a telegraph paper from his pocket and showed it to me. It was from "Lemuel Blount, London." It announced the news in the usual shocking laconic manner, and said, "I write to you to Dykham."

"I shall get the letter this evening when I reach Dykham, and I'll tell you all that is in it to-morrow. The telegraph message had reached me yesterday, when I saw you, but I could not bear to tell you the dreadful news until I had confirmation, and that has come. The vicar has had a message, about which there can be no mistake. And now, darling, put on your things, and come out for a little walk—I have ever so many things to talk to you about."

Here was a new revolution in my troubled history. More or less of the horror of uncertainty again encompassed my future years. But grief, quite unselfish, predomi-

nated in my agitation. I had lost a benefactor. His kind face was before me, and the voice, always subdued to tenderness when he spoke to me, was in my ear. I was grieved to the heart.

I got on my hat and jacket, and with a heavy heart went out with Richard.

For many reasons the most secluded path was that best suited for our walk. Richard Marston had just told the servants the substance of the message he had received that morning from Mr. Blount, so that they could have no difficulty about answering inquiries at the hall-door.

We soon found ourselves in the path that had witnessed so many of our meetings. I wondered what Richard intended talking about. He had been silent and thoughtful. He hardly uttered a word during our walk, until we had reached what I may call our trysting-tree, the grand old beech-tree, under which a huge log of timber, roughly squared, formed a seat.

Though little disposed myself to speak, his silence alarmed me.

"Ethel, darling," he said, suddenly "have you formed any plans for the future?"

"Plans!" I echoed. "I don't know—what do you mean, Richard?"

"I mean," he continued, sadly, "have you considered how this misfortune may affect us? Did Sir Harry ever tell you anythink about his intentions—I mean what he thought of doing by his will? Don't look so scared, darling," he added, with a melancholy smile; "you will see just now what my reasons are. You can't suppose that a sordid thought ever entered my mind."

I was relieved.

"No; he never said a word to me about his will, except what I told you," I answered.

"Because the people who knew him at Wrexham are talking. Suppose he has cut me off and provided for you, could I any longer in honour hold you to an engage-

ment, to fulfil which I could contribute nothing?"

"Oh, Richard, darling, how can you talk so? Don't you know, whatever I possess on earth is yours."

"Then my little woman refuses to give me up, even if there were difficulties?" he said, pressing my hands, and smiling down upon my face in a kind of rapture.

"I could not give you up, Richard—you know I couldn't," I answered.

"My darling!" he exclaimed, softly, looking down upon me still with the same smile.

"Richard, how could you ever have dreamed such a thing? You don't know how you wound me."

"I never thought it, I never believed it, darling. I knew it was impossible; whatever difficulties might come between us, I knew that I could not live without you; and I thought you loved me as well. No-

thing then shall part us—nothing. Don't you say so? Say it, Ethel. I swear it, nothing."

I gave him the promise; it was but repeating what I had often said before. Never was vow uttered from a more willing heart. Even now I am sure he admired me, and, after his manner, loved me with a vehement passion.

"But there are other people, Ethel," he resumed, "who think that I shall be very well off, who think that I shall inherit all my uncle's great fortune. But all may not go smoothly, you see; there may be great difficulties. Promise me, swear it once more, that you will suffer no obstacles to separate us; that we shall be united, be they what they may; that you will never, so help you Heaven, forsake me or marry another"

I did repeat the promise. We walked towards home; I wondering what special difficulty he could be thinking of now; but,

restrained by a kind of fear, I did not ask him.

"I'm obliged to go away again, immediately," said he, after another short silence; "but my business will be over to-night, and I shall be here again in the morning, and then I shall be my own master for a time, and have a quiet day or two, and be able to open my heart to you, Ethel."

We walked on again in silence. Suddenly he stopped, laying his hand on my shoulder, and looking sharply into my face, said,

"I'll leave you here—it is time, Ethel, that I should be off." He held my hand in his, and his eyes were fixed steadily upon mine. "Look here," he said, after another pause, "I must make a bitter confession, Ethel; you know me with all my faults—I have no principle of calculation in me—equity and all that sort of thing, would stand a poor chance with me against passion—I am all passion; it has been my undoing, and

will yet I hope," and he looked on me with a wild glow in his dark eyes, "be the making of me, Ethel. No obstacle shall separate us, you have sworn; and mind, Ethel, I am a fellow that never forgives, and as Heaven is my judge, if you give me up, I'll not forgive you. But that will never be. God bless you, darling—you shall see me early to-morrow. Go you in that direction—let us keep our secret a day or two longer. You look as if you thought me mad—I'm not that—though I sometimes half think so myself. There has been enough in my life to make a steadier brain than mine crazy. Good-bye, Ethel, darling, till to-morrow. God bless you!"

With these words he left me. His reckless language had plainly a meaning in it. My heart sank as I thought on the misfortune that had reduced me again to uncertainty, and perhaps to a miserable dependence. It was by no means impossible that nothing had been provided for either

him or me by Sir Harry Rokestone. Men, prompt and accurate in everything else, so often go on postponing a will until "the door is shut to," and the hour passed for ever. It was horrible allowing such thoughts to intrude; but Richard's conversation was so full of the subject, and my position was so critical and dependent, that it did recur, not with sordid hopes, but in the form of a great and reasonable fear.

When Richard was out of sight, as he quickly was among the trees, I turned back, and sitting down again on the rude bench under our own beech-tree, I had a long and bitter cry, all to myself.

CHAPTER XVIII.

AT THE THREE NUNS.

WHEN Richard Marston left me, his chaise stood at the door, with a team of four horses, quite necessary to pull a four-wheeled carriage over the fells, through whose gorges the road to the nearest railway-station is carried.

The pleasant setting sun flashed over the distant fells, and glimmered on the pebbles of the courtyard, and cast a long shadow of Richard Marston, as he stood upon the steps, looking down upon the yellow, worn flags, in dark thought.

"Here, put this in," he said, handing his

only piece of luggage, a black leather travelling-bag, to one of the post-boys. "You know the town of Golden Friars?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, stop at Mr. Jarlcot's house."

Away went the chaise, with its thin roll of dust, like the smoke of a hedge-fire, all along the road, till they pulled up at Mr. Jarlcot's house.

Out jumped Mr. Marston, and knocked a sharp summons with the brass knocker on the hall-door.

The maid opened the door, and stood on the step with a mysterious look of inquiry in Mr. Marston's face. The rumour that was already slowly spreading in Golden Friars had suddenly been made sure by a telegraphic message from Lemuel Blount to Mr. Jarlcot. His good wife had read it just five minutes before Mr. Marston's arrival.

"When is Mr. Jarlcot to be home again?"

"Day after to-morrow, please, sir."

"Well, when he comes, don't forget to tell him I called. No, this is better," and he wrote in pencil on his card the date and the words, "Called twice—most anxious to see Mr. Jarlcot;" and laid it on the table. "Can I see Mr. Spaight?" he inquired.

Tall, stooping Mr. Spaight, the confidential man, with his bald head, spectacles, and long nose, emerged politely, with a pen behind his ear, at this question, from the door of the front room, which was Mr. Jarlcot's office.

"Oh! Mr. Spaight," said Richard Marston, "have you heard from Mr. Jarlcot to-day?"

"A short letter, Mr. Marston, containing nothing of business—only a few items of news; he's in London till to-morrow—he saw Mr. Blount there."

"Then he has heard, of course, of our misfortune?"

"Yes, sir; and we all sympathise with you, Mr. Marston, deeply, sir, in your afflic-

tion. Will you please to step in, sir, and look at the letter?"

Mr. Marston accepted the invitation.

There were two or three sentences that interested him.

"I have had a conversation with Mr. Blount this morning. He fears very much that Sir Harry did not execute the will. I saw Messrs. Hutt and Babbage, who drafted the will; but they can throw no light upon the matter, and say that the result of a search, only, can; which Mr. Blount says won't take five minutes to make."

This was interesting; but the rest was rubbish. Mr. Marston took his leave, got into the chaise again, and drove under the windows of the "George and Dragon," along the already deserted road that ascends the fells from the margin of the lake.

Richard Marston put his head from the window and looked back; there was no living creature in his wake. Before him he saw nothing but the post-boys' stooping

backs, and the horses with their four patient heads bobbing before him. The light was failing, still it would have served to read by for a little while; and there was something he was very anxious to read. He was irresolute—there was a risk in it—he could not make up his mind.

He looked at his watch—it would take him nearly three hours to reach the station at the other side of the fells. Unlucky the delay at Dorracleugh!

The light failed. White mists began to crawl across the road, and were spreading and rising fantastically on the hill-sides. The moon came out. He was growing more impatient. In crossing a mountain the eye measures so little distance gained for the time expended. This journey seemed, to him, interminable.

At one of the zig-zag turns of the road, there rises a huge fragment of white stone, bearing a rude resemblance to a horseman; a highwayman, you might fancy him, await-

ing the arrival of the travellers. In Richard's eye it took the shape of old Sir Harry Rokestone, as he used to sit, when he had reined in his tall iron-grey hunter, and was waiting to have a word with some one coming up.

He muttered something as he looked sternly ahead at this fantastic reminder. On they drove; the image resolved itself into its rude sides and angles, and was passed; and the pale image of Sir Harry no longer waylaid his nephew.

Slowly the highest point of the road was gained, and then begins the flying descent; and the well-known landmarks, as he consults his watch, from time to time, by the moonlight, assure him that they will reach the station in time to catch the train.

He is there. He pays his post-boys, and with his black travelling-bag in hand, runs out upon the gravelled front, from which the platform extends its length.

"The up-train not come yet?" inquired

the young man, looking down the line eagerly.

"Not due for four minutes, Mr. Marston," said the station-master, with officious politeness, "and we shall hardly have it up till some minutes later. They are obliged to slacken speed in the Malwyn cutting at present. Your luggage all right, I hope? Shall I get your ticket for you, Mr. Marston?"

The extraordinary politeness of the official had, perhaps, some connection with the fact that the rumour of Sir Harry's death was there already, and the Rokestone estates extended beyond the railway. Richard Marston was known to be the only nephew of the deceased baronet, and to those who knew nothing of the interior politics of the family, his succession appeared certain.

Mr. Marston thanked him, but would not give him the trouble; he fancied that the station-master, who was perfectly innocent of any treacherous design, wished to

play the part of a detective, and find out all he could about his movements and belongings.

Richard Marston got away from him as quickly as he civilly could, without satisfying his curiosity on any point. The train was up, and the doors clapping a few minutes later; and he, with his bag, rug, and umbrella, got into his place with a thin, sour old lady in black, opposite ; a nurse at one side, with two children in her charge, who were always jumping down on people's feet, or climbing up again, and running to the window, and bawling questions with incessant clamour ; and at his other side, a mummy-coloured old gentleman with an olive-green cloth cap, the flaps of which were tied under his chin, and a cream-coloured muffler.

He had been hoping for a couple of hours' quiet—perhaps a tenantless carriage. This state of things for a man in search of meditation was disappointing.

They were now, at length, at Dykham.

A porter in waiting, from the inn called the "Three Nuns," took Marston's bag and rug, and led the way to that house, only fifty yards off, where he took up his quarters for the night.

He found Mr. Blount's promised letter from London there. He did not wait for candles and his sitting-room. In his hat and overcoat, by the gas-light at the bar, he read it breathlessly. It said substantially what Mr. Jarlcot's letter had already told him, and nothing more. It was plain, then, that Sir Harry had left everyone in the dark as to whether he had or had not executed the will.

In answer to the waiter's hospitable inquiries about supper, he said he had dined late. It was not true; but it was certain that he had no appetite.

He got a sitting-room to himself; he ordered a fire, for he thought the night chilly. He had bought a couple of books, two or three magazines, and as many news-

papers. He had his window-curtains drawn; and their agreeable smell of old tobacco smoke assured him that there would be no objection to his cigar.

"I'll ring when I want anything," he said; "and, in the meantime, let me be quiet."

It was here, when he had been negotiating for Sir Harry the renewal of certain leases to a firm in Dykham, that the telegraph had brought him the startling message, and Mr. Blount said in the same message that he was writing particulars by that day's post.

Mr. Marston had not allowed grass to grow under his feet, as you see; and he was now in the same quarters, about to put the case before himself, with a thorough command of its facts.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE WILL.

CANDLES lighted, shutters closed, curtains drawn, and a small but cheerful fire flickering in the grate. The old-fashioned room looked pleasant; Richard Marston was nervous, and not like himself. He looked over the "deaths" in the papers, but Sir Harry's was not among them. He threw the papers one after the other on the table, and read nothing.

He got up and stood with his back to the fire. He looked like a man who had got a chill, whom nothing could warm, who was in for a fever. He was in a state he had

not anticipated—he almost wished he had left undone the things he had done.

He bolted the door—he listened at it—he tried it with his hand. He had something in his possession that embarrassed and almost frightened him, as if it had been some damning relic of a murdered man.

He sat down and drew from his breast-pocket a tolerably bulky paper, a law-paper with a piece of red tape about it, and a seal affixing the tape to the paper. The paper was endorsed in pencil, in Sir Harry's hand, with the words, "Witnessed by Darby Mayne and Hugh Fenwick," and the date followed.

A sudden thought struck him; he put the paper into his pocket again, and made a quiet search of the room, even opening and looking into the two old cupboards, and peeping behind the curtains to satisfy his nervous fancy that no one was concealed there.

Then again he took out the paper, cut the

tape, broke the seal, unfolded the broad document, and holding it extended in both hands, read, "The last will and testament of Sir Harry Rokestone, of Dorracleugh, in the County of ——, Baronet."

Here, then, was the great sacrilege. He stood there with the spoils of the dead in his hands. But there was no faltering now in his purpose.

He read on: "I, Harry Rokestone, &c., Baronet, of Dorracleugh, &c., being of sound mind, and in good health, do make this my last will," &c.

And on and on he read, his face darkening.

"Four trustees," he muttered, and read on for awhile, for he could not seize its effect as rapidly and easily as an expert would. "Well, yes, two thousand two hundred pounds sterling by way of annuity —annuity!—to be paid for the term of his natural life, in four equal sums, on the first of May, the first of August—yes, and so on

—as a first charge upon all the said estates, and so forth. Well, what else ?"

And so he went on humming and humming over the paper, his head slowly turning from side to side as he read.

"And Blount to have two hundred a year! I guessed that old Methodist knew what he was about; and then there's the money. What about the money?" He read on as before. "Five thousand pounds. Five thousand for me. Upon my soul! out of one hundred and twenty thousand pounds in government stock. That's modest, all things considered, and an annuity just of two thousand two hundred a year for my life, the rental of the estates, as I happen to know, being nearly nine thousand." This he said with a sneering, uneasy chuckle. "And that is all!"

And he stood erect, holding the paper by the corner between his finger and thumb, and letting it lie against his knee.

"And everything else," he muttered,

"land and money, without exception, goes to Miss Ethel Ware. She the lady of the fee; I a poor annuitant!"

He was half stifled with rage and mortification.

"I see now, I see what he means. I see the drift of the whole thing. I see my way. I mustn't make a mistake, though—there can't be any. Nothing can be more distinct."

He folded up the will rapidly, and replaced it in his pocket.

Within the last half-hour his forehead had darkened, and his cheeks had hollowed. How strangely these subtle muscular contractions correspond with the dominant moral action of the moment!

He took out another paper, a very old one, worn at the edges, and indorsed "Case on behalf of Richard Rokestone Marston, Esquire." I suppose he had read it at least twenty times that day, during his journey to Dorracleugh. "No, nothing on earth

can be clearer or more positive," he thought. "The whole thing is as plain as that two and two make four. It covers everything."

There were two witnesses to this will corresponding with the indorsement, each had signed in presence of the other; all was technically exact.

Mr. Marston had seen and talked with these witnesses on his arrival at Dorracleugh, and learned enough to assure him that nothing was to be apprehended from them. They were persons in Sir Harry's employment, and Sir Harry had called them up on the day that the will was dated, and got them to witness in all about a dozen different documents, which they believed to be leases, but were not sure. Sir Harry had told them nothing about the nature of the papers they were witnessing, and had never mentioned a will to them. Richard Marston had asked Mrs. Shackleten also, and she had never heard Sir Harry speak of a will.

While the news of Sir Harry's death rest-

ed only upon a telegraphic message, which might be forged or precipitate, he dared not break the seal and open the will. Mr. Blount's and Mr. Jarlcot's letters, which he had read this evening, took that event out of the possibility of question.

He was safe also in resolving a problem that was now before him. Should he rest content with his annuity and five thousand pounds, or seize the entire property, by simply destroying the will?"

If the will were allowed to stand he might count on my fidelity, and secure possession of all it bequeathed by marrying me. He had only to place the will somewhere in Sir Harry's room, where it would be sure to be found, and the affair would proceed in its natural course without more trouble to him.

But Mr. Blount was appointed, with very formidable powers, my guardian, and one of his duties was to see, in the event of my marrying, that suitable settlements were

made, and that there was no reasonable objection to the candidate for my hand.

Mr. Blount was a quiet but very resolute man in all points of duty. Knowing what was Sir Harry's opinion of his nephew, would he, within the meaning of the will, accept him as a suitor against whom no reasonable objection lay? And even if this were got over, Mr. Blount would certainly sanction no settlement which did not give me as much as I gave. My preponderance of power, as created by the will, must therefore be maintained in the settlement. I had no voice in the matter; and thus it seems that in most respects, even by marriage, the operation of the will was inexorable. Why, then, should the will exist? and why, with such a fortune and liberty within his grasp, should he submit to conditions that would fetter him?

Even the pleasure of depriving Mr. Blount of his small annuity, ridiculous as such a consideration seemed, had its influence. He

was keenly incensed with that officious and interested agent. The vicar, in their first conversation, had opened his eyes as to the action of that pretended friend.

"Mr. Blount told me, just before he left this," said the good vicar, "that he had been urging and even entreating Sir Harry for a long time to execute a will which he had by him, requiring nothing but his signature, but, as yet, without success, and that he feared he would never do it."

Now approached the moment of decision. He had read a trial in the newspapers long before, in which a curious case was proved. A man in the position of a gentleman had gone down to a deserted house that belonged to him, for the express purpose of there destroying a will which would have injuriously affected him.

He had made up his mind to destroy it, but he was haunted with the idea that, do it how he might in the village where he lived, one way or other the crime would be dis-

covered. Accordingly he visited, with many precautions, this old house, which was surrounded closely by a thick wood. From one of the chimneys a boy, in search of jackdaws, saw one little puff of smoke escape, and his curiosity being excited, he climbed to the window of the room to which the chimney corresponded, and peeping in, he saw something flaming on the hob, and near it a man, who started, and hurriedly left the room on observing him.

Fancying pursuit, the detected man took his departure, without venturing to return to the room.

The end of the matter was that his journey to the old house was tracked, and not only did the boy identify him, and tell his suspicious story, but the charred pieces of burnt paper found upon the hob, having been exposed to chemical action, had revealed the writing, a portion of which contained the signatures of the testator and the witnesses, and these and other parts thus

rescued, identified it with the original draft in possession of the dead man's attorney. Thus the crime was proved, and the will set up and supplemented by what, I believe, is termed secondary evidence.

Who could be too cautious, then, in such a matter? It seemed as hard to hide away effectually all traces of a will destroyed as the relics of a murder.

Again he was tempted to spare the will, and rest content with an annuity and safety. It was but a temptation, however, and a passing one.

He unbolted the door softly, and rang the bell. The waiter found him extended on a sofa, apparently deep in his magazine.

He ordered tea—nothing else; he was precise in giving his order—he did not want the servant pottering about his room—he had reasons for choosing to be specially quiet.

The waiter returned with his tea-tray, and found him buried, as before, in his magazine.

"Is everything there?" inquired Richard Marston.

"Everything there? Yes, sir, everything."

"Well, then, you need not come again till I touch the bell."

The waiter withdrew.

Mr. Marston continued absorbed in his magazine for just three minutes. Then he rose softly, stepped lightly to the door, and listened. He bolted it again; tried it, and found it fast.

In a moment the will was in his hand. He gave one dark, searching look round the room, and then he placed the document in the very centre of the embers. He saw it smoke sullenly, and curl and slowly warp, and spring with a faint sound, that made him start more than ever cannon did, into sudden flame. That little flame seemed like a bale-fire to light up the broad sky of night with a vengeful flicker, and throw a pale glare over the wide parks and mosses,

the forests, fells, and meres, of dead Sir Harry's great estate; and when the flame leaped up and died, it seemed that there was no light left in the room, and he could see nothing but the myriad little worms of fire wriggling all over the black flakes which he thrust, like struggling enemies, into the hollow of the fire.

Richard Marston was a man of redundant courage, and no scruple. But have all men some central fibre of fear that can be reached, and does the ghost of the conscience they have killed within them sometimes rise and overshadow them with horror? Richard Marston, with his feet on the fender and the tongs in his hands, pressed down the coals upon the ashes of the will, and felt faint and dizzy, as he had done on the night of the shipwreck, when, with bleeding forehead, he had sat down for the first time in the steward's house at Malory.

An event as signal had happened now. After nearly ten minutes had passed, during

which he had never taken his eyes off the spot where the ashes were glowing, he got up and took the candle down to see whether a black film of the paper had escaped from the grate. Then stealthily he opened the window to let out any smell of burnt paper.

He lighted his cigar, and smoked; unbolted the door, rang the bell, and ordered brandy-and-water. The suspense was over, and the crisis past.

He was resolved to sit there till morning, to see that fire burnt out.

CHAPTER XX.

THE SERPENT'S SMILE.

THERE came on a sudden a great quiet over Dorracleugh—the quiet of death.

There was no longer any doubt, all the country round, as to the fact that the old baronet was dead. Richard Marston had placed at all the gates notices to the effect that the funeral would not take place for a week, at soonest—that no day had yet been fixed for it, and that early notice should be given.

The slight fuss that had prevailed within doors, for the greater part of a day, had now quite subsided—and, quiet as it always

was, Dorracleugh was now more silent and stirless than ever.

I could venture now to extend my walks anywhere about the place, without the risk of meeting any stranger.

If there is a melancholy there is also something sublime and consolatory in the character of the scenery that surrounds it. Everyone has felt the influence of lofty mountains near. This region is all beautiful; but the very spirit of solitude and grandeur is over it.

I was just consulting with my maid about some simple provisional mourning, for which I was about to dispatch her to the town, when our conference was arrested by the appearance of Richard Marston before the window.

I had my things on, for I thought it not impossible he might arrive earlier than he had the day before.

I told my maid to come again by-and-by; and I went out to meet him.

Well, we are now walking on the wild path, along the steep side of the cleugh, towards the lake. What kind of conversation is this going to be? His voice and manner are very gentle—but he looks pale and stern, like a man going into a battle. The signs are very slight, but dreadful. Oh! that the next half-hour were over! What am I about to hear?

We walked on for a time in silence.

The first thing he said was:

"You are to stay here at Dorracleugh—you must not go—but I'm afraid you will be vexed with me."

Then we advanced about twenty steps; we were walking slowly, and not a word was spoken during that time.

He began again:

"Though, after all, it need not make any real difference. There is no will, Ethel; the vicar can tell you that; he had the key, and has made search—no will; and you are left unprovided for—but that shan't affect

you. I am heir-at-law, and nearest-of-kin. You know what that means. Everything he possessed, land or money, comes to me. But—I've put my foot into it; it is too late regretting. I can't marry."

There was an interval of silence—he was looking in my face.

"There! the murder's out. I knew you would be awfully vexed. So am I—miserable—but I can't. That is, perhaps, for many years."

There was another silence. I could no more have spoken than I could, by an effort of my will, have lifted the mountain at the other side of the lake from its foundation.

Perhaps he misinterpreted my silence.

"I ought to have been more frank with you, Ethel—I blame myself very much, I assure you. Can't you guess? Well, I was an awful fool—I'll tell you everything. I feel that I ought to have done so, long ago; but you know, one can't always make up one's mind to be quite frank, and tell a

painful story. I am married. In an evil hour, I married a woman in every way unsuited to me—pity me. In a transitory illusion, I sacrificed my life—and, what is dearer, my love. I have not so much as seen her for years, and I am told she is not likely to live long. In the meantime I am yours only—yours entirely and irrevocably, your own. I can offer you safety here, and happiness, my own boundless devotion and adoration, an asylum here, and all the authority and rights of a wife. Ethel—dearest—you won't leave me?"

I looked up in his face, scared—a sudden look, quite unexpected. I saw a cunning, selfish face gloating down on me, with a gross, confident, wicked simper.

That odious smile vanished, his eye shrank; he looked detected or disconcerted for a moment, but he rallied.

"I say, I look on myself, in the sight of heaven, as married to you. You have pledged yourself to me by every vow that can

tie woman to man; you have sworn that no obstacle shall keep us apart. That oath was not without a meaning, and you know it wasn't; and, by heaven! you shan't break my heart for nothing! Come, Ethel, be a girl of sense—don't you see we are controlled by fate? Look at the circumstances. Where's the good in quarrelling with me? Don't you see the position I'm placed in, about that miserable evidence? Don't you see that I am able and anxious to do everything for you? Could a girl in your situation do a better or a wiser thing than unite her interests with mine, indissolubly? For God's sake, where's the use of making me desperate? What do you want to drive me to? Why should you insist on making me your enemy? How do you think it's all to end?"

Could I have dreamed that he could ever have looked at me with such a countenance, and spoken to me in such a tone? I felt myself growing colder and colder; I could

not move my eyes from him. His image seemed to swim before me; his harsh, frightful tones grow confused. My hands were to my temples, I could not speak; my answer was one piteous scream.

I found myself hurrying along the wild path, towards the house, with hardly a clear recollection, without one clear thought. I don't know whether he tried to detain me, or began to follow me. I remember, at the hall-door, from habit, going up a step or two, in great excitement—we act so nearly mechanically! A kind of horror seized me at sight of the half-open door. I turned and hurried down the avenue.

It was not until I had reached the "George and Dragon"—at the sleepiest hour, luckily, of the tranquil little town of Golden Friars—that I made a first effectual effort to collect my thoughts.

I was simply a fugitive. To return to Dorracleugh, where Richard Marston was

now master, was out of the question. I was in a mood to accept all ill news as certain. It never entered my mind that he had intended to deceive me with respect to Sir Harry's will. Neither had he as to my actually unprovided state. Here then I stood a fugitive.

I walked up to Mr. Turnbull, the host of the "George and Dragon," whom I saw at the inn-door, and having heard his brief but genuine condolences, without half knowing what he was saying, I ordered a carriage to bring me to the railway-station; and while I was waiting I wrote a note in the quiet little room, with a window looking across the lake, to the good vicar.

Mr. Turnbull was one of those heavy, comfortable persons who are willing to take everybody's business and reasons for granted. He therefore bored me with no surmises as to the reasons of my solitary excursion at so oddly chosen a time.

I think, now, that my wiser course would have been to go to the vicar, and explaining generally my objections to remaining at Dorracleugh, to have asked frankly for permission to place myself under his care until the arrival of Mr. Blount.

There were fifty other things I ought to have thought of, though I only wonder, considering the state in which my mind was at the moment, that I was able to write so coherently as I did to the vicar. I had my purse with me, containing fifty pounds, which poor Sir Harry had given me just before he left Dorracleugh. With no more than this, which I had fortunately brought down with me to the drawing-room, for the purpose of giving my maid a bank-note to take to the town to pay for my intended purchases, I was starting on my journey to London! Without luggage, or servant, or companion, or plan of any kind—inspired by the one instinct, to get as rapidly as

possible out of sight and reach of Dorracleugh, and to earn my bread by my own exertions.

CHAPTER XXI.

LAURA GREY.

YOU are to suppose my journey safely ended in London. The first thing I did after securing lodgings, and making some few purchases, was to go to the house where my great friend, Sir Harry Rokestone, had died. But Mr. Blount, I found, had left London for Golden Friars, only a few hours before my arrival.

Another disappointment awaited me at Mr. Forrester's chambers—he was out of town, taking his holiday.

I began now to experience the consequences of my precipitation. It was too late, however, to reflect; and if the plunge was

to be made, perhaps the sooner made the better. I wrote to the vicar, to give him my address, also to Mr. Blount, telling him the course on which I had decided. I at once resolved to look for a situation, as governess to very young children. I framed an advertisement with a great deal of care, which I published in the *Times;* but no satisfactory result followed, and two or three days passed in like manner.

After paying for my journey and my London purchases, there remained to me, of my fifty pounds, about thirty-two. My situation was not so frightful as it might have been. But with the strictest economy a limited time must see my store exhausted; and no one who has not been in such a situation can fancy the ever-recurring panic of counting, day after day, the diminishing chances between you and the chasm to whose edge you are slowly sliding.

A few days brought me a letter from the good vicar. There occurred in it a passage

which finally quieted the faint struggle of hope now and then reviving. He said, "I observe by your letter that you are already apprised of the disappointing result of my search for the will of the late Sir Harry Rokestone. He had informed several persons of the spot where, in the event of his executing one, which he always, I am told, treated as very doubtful, it would be found. He had placed the key of the safe along with some other things at his departure, but without alluding to his will. At the request of Mr. Marston I opened the safe, and the result was, I regret to say, that no will was found." I was now, then, in dread earnest to lay my account for a life of agitation and struggle.

At last a promising answer to my advertisement reached me. It said, "The Countess of Rillingdon will be in town till this day week, and will be happy to see L. Y. D. X., whose advertisement appears in the *Times* of this morning, if possible to-

day before two." The house was in Belgrave Square. It was now near twelve. I called immediately with a note, to say I would call at a quarter to two, and at that hour precisely I returned.

It was plain that this was but a flying visit of the patrician owners of the house. Some luggage, still in its shiny black casings, was in the hall; the lamps hung in bags; carpets had disappeared; curtains were pinned up; and servants seemed scanty, and more fussy than in the organized discipline of a household. I told the servant that I had called in consequence of a note from Lady Rillingdon, and he conducted me forthwith up the stairs. We passed on the way a young lady coming down, whom I conjectured to be on the same errand as myself. We exchanged stolen looks as we passed, each, I daresay, conjecturing the other's chances.

"Her ladyship will see you presently," he said, opening a door.

I entered, and whom should I see waiting in the room, in a chair, in her hat, with her parasol in her hand, but Laura Grey.

"Ethel!"

"Laura!"

"Darling!"

And each in a moment was locked in the other's embrace. With tears, with trembling laughter, and more kisses than I can remember, we signalized our meeting.

"How wonderful that I should have met you here, Laura!" said I; though what was the special wonder in meeting her there more than anywhere else, I could not easily have defined. "You must tell me, darling, if you are looking to come to Lady Rillingdon, for, if you are, I would not for the world think of it."

Laura laughed very merrily at this.

"Why, Ethel, what are you dreaming of? I'm Lady Rillingdon!"

Sometimes a mistake seizes upon us with an unaccountable obstinacy. Laura's claim-

ing to be Lady Rillingdon seemed to me simply a jest of that poor kind which relies entirely on incongruity, without so much colour of possibility as to make it humorous.

I laughed, faintly enough, with Laura, from mere politeness, wondering when this poor joke would cease to amuse her; and the more she looked in my face, the more heartily she laughed, and the more melancholy became my endeavour to accompany her.

"What can I do to convince you, darling?" she exclaimed at length, half distracted.

She got up and touched the bell. I began to be a little puzzled. The servant appeared, and she asked,

"Is his lordship at home?"

"I'll inquire, my lady," he answered, and retired.

This indeed was demonstration; I could be incredulous no longer. We kissed again

and again, and were once more laughing and gabbling together, when the servant returned with,

"Please, my lady, his lordship went out half an hour ago."

"I'm so sorry," she said, turning to me, "but he'll be back very soon, I'm sure. I want so much to introduce him; I think you'll like him."

Luncheon soon interrupted us; and when that little interval was over, she took me to the same quiet room, and we talked and mutually questioned, and got out each the whole history of the other.

There was only one little child of this marriage, which seemed, in every way but that, so happy—a daughter. Their second, a son, had died. This pretty little creature we had with us for a time, and then it went out with its nurse for a drive, and we, over our afternoon tea, resumed our confessions and inquiries. Laura had nearly as much to tell as I. In the midst of our talk Lord

Rillingdon came in. I knew whom I was to meet. I was therefore not surprised when the very man whom I had seen faint and bleeding in the wood of Plas Ylwd, whom Richard Marston had shot, and whom I had seen but once since at Lady Mardykes's ball, stood before me. In a moment we were old friends.

He remained with us for about ten minutes, talked kindly and pleasantly, and drank his cup of tea.

These recollections, in my present situation, were agitating. The image of Richard Marston had re-appeared in the sinister shadow in which it had been early presented to me by the friends who had warned me so kindly, but in vain.

In a little time we talked on as before, and everything she told me added to the gloom and horror in which Marston was now shrouded in my sorrowful imagination.

As soon as the first delighted surprise of meeting Laura had a little subsided, my

fears returned, and all I had to dread from the active malice of Richard Marston vaguely gathered on my stormy horizon again.

CHAPTER XXII.

A CHAPTER OF EXPLANATIONS.

LAURA'S long talk with me resulted in these facts. They cleared up her story.

She was the only daughter of Mr. Grey, of Halston Manor, of whom I had often heard. He had died in possession of a great estate, and of shares in the Great Central Bank worth two hundred thousand pounds. Within a few weeks after his death the bank failed, and the estate was drawn into the ruin. Of her brother there is no need to speak, for he died only a year after, and has no connexion with my story.

Laura Grey would have been a suitable,

and even a princely match for a man of rank and fortune, had it not been for this sudden and total reverse. Old Lord Rillingdon—Viscount Rillingdon, his son, had won his own position in the peerage by brilliant service—had wished to marry his son to the young lady. No formal overtures had been made; but Lord Rillingdon's house, Northcot Hall, was near, and the young people were permitted to improve their acquaintance into intimacy, and so an unavowed attachment was formed. The crash came, and Lord Rillingdon withdrew his son, Mr. Jennings, from the perilous neighbourhood.

A year elapsed before the exact state of Mr. Grey's affairs was ascertained. During that time Richard Marston, who had seen and admired Laura Grey, whose brother was an intimate friend of his, came to the neighbourhood and endeavoured to insinuate himself into her good graces. He had soon learned her ruined circumstances, and found-

ed the cruellest hopes upon this melancholy knowledge.

To forward his plans he had conveyed scandalous falsehoods to Mr. Jennings, with the object of putting an end to his rivalry. These Mr. Jennings had refused to believe; but there were others no less calculated to excite his jealousy, and to alienate his affection. He had shown the effect of this latter influence by a momentary coldness, which roused Laura Grey's fiery spirit; for gentle as she was, she was proud.

She had written to tell Mr. Jennings that all was over between them, and that she would never see him more. He had replied in a letter which did not reach her till long after, in terms the most passionate and agonising, vowing that he held himself affianced to her while he lived, and would never marry anyone but her.

In this state of things Miss Grey had come to us, resolved to support herself by her own exertions.

Lord Rillingdon, having reason to suspect his son's continued attachment to Laura Grey, and having learned accidentally that there was a lady of that name residing at Malory, made a visit to Cardyllion. He was the old gentleman in the chocolate-coloured coat, who had met us as we returned from church, and held a conversation with her, under the trees, on the mill-road.

His object was to exact a promise that she would hold no communication with his son for the future. His tone was insolent, dictatorial, and in the highest degree irritating. She repelled his insinuations with spirit, and peremptorily refused to make any reply whatever to demands urged in a temper so arrogant and insulting.

The result was that he parted from her highly incensed, and without having carried his point, leaving my dear sister and me in a fever of curiosity.

Richard Rokestone Marston was the only near relation of Sir Harry Rokestone. He

had fallen under the baronet's just and high displeasure. After a course of wild and wicked extravagance, he had finally ruined himself in the opinion of Sir Harry by committing a fraud, which, indeed, would never have come to light had it not been for a combination of unlucky chances.

In consequence of this his uncle refused to see him; but at Mr. Blount's intercession agreed to allow him a small annual sum, on the strict condition that he was to leave England. It was when actually on his way to London, which, for a reason that, except in its result, has no connexion with my story, he chose to reach through Bristol, that he had so nearly lost his life in the disaster of the *Conway Castle.*

Here was the first contact of my story with his.

His short stay at Malory was signalised by his then unaccountable suit to me, and by his collision with Mr. Jennings, who had come down there on some very vague information

that Laura Grey was in the neighbourhood. He had succeeded in meeting her, and in renewing their engagement, and at last had persuaded her to consent to a secret marriage, which at first involved the anguish of a long separation, during which a dangerous illness threatened the life of her husband.

I am hurrying through this explanation, but I must relate a few more events and circumstances which throw a light upon some of the passages in the history I have been giving you of my life.

Why did Richard Marston conceive, in perfect good faith, a fixed purpose to marry a girl of whom he knew enough to be aware that she was without that which prudence would have insisted on as a first necessity in his circumstances—money?

Well, it turned out to have been by no means so imprudent a plan. I learned from Mr. Blount the particulars that explained it.

Mr. Blount, who took an interest in him, and had always cherished a belief that he was reclaimable, told him repeatedly that Sir Harry had often said that he would take one of Mabel Ware's daughters for his heiress. This threat he had secretly laughed at, knowing the hostility that subsisted between the families. He was, however, startled at last. Mr. Blount had shown him a letter in which Sir Harry distinctly stated that he had made up his mind to leave everything he possessed to me. This he showed him for the purpose of inducing a patient endeavour to regain his lost place in the old man's regard. It effectually alarmed Richard Marston; and when a chance storm threw him at our door, the idea of averting that urgent danger, and restoring himself to his lost position, by an act of masterly strategy, occurred to him, and instantly bore fruit in action.

After his return, and his admission as an inmate at Dorracleugh, the danger appear-

ed still more urgent, and his opportunities were endless.

He had succeeded, as I have told you, in binding me by an engagement. In that position he was safe, no matter what turned up. He had, however, now made his election; and how cruelly, you already know. Did he, according to his low standard, love me? I believe, so far as was consistent with his nature, he did. He was furious at my having escaped him, and would have pursued, and no doubt discovered me, had he been free at the moment to leave Dorracleugh.

His alleged marriage was, I believe, a fiction. But he could not bear, I think, to lose me; and had he obtained another interview, he would have held very different language. Mr. Blount thought that he had, perhaps, formed some schemes for a marriage of ambition, in favour of which I was to have been put aside. If so, however, I do not think that he would have purchased

the enjoyment of such ambition at the price of losing me at once and for ever. I dare say you will laugh at the simplicity of this vanity in a woman who, in a case like this, could suppose such a thing. I do suppose it, notwithstanding. I am sure that, so far as his nature was capable of love, he did love me. With the sad evidences on which this faith was grounded, I will not weary you. Let those vain conclusions rest where they are, deep in my heart.

The important post which Lord Rillingdon had filled, in one of our greatest dependencies, and the skill, courage, and wisdom with which he had directed affairs during a very critical period, had opened a way for him to still higher things. He and Laura were going out in about six months to India, and she and he insisted that I should accompany them as their guest. This would have been too delightful under happier circumstances; but the sense of dependence, however disguised, is dreadful. We are so con-

structed that for an average mind it is more painful to share in idle dependence the stalled ox of a friend than to work for one's own dinner of herbs.

They were going to Brighton, and I consented to make them a visit there of three or four weeks; after which I was to resume my search for a "situation." Laura entreated me at least to accept the care of her little child; but this, too, I resolutely declined. At first sight you will charge me with folly; but if you, being of my sex, will place yourself for a moment in my situation, you will understand why I refused. I felt that I should have been worse than useless. Laura would never have ordered me about as a good mother would like to order the person in charge of her only child. She would have been embarrassed and unhappy, and I conscious of being in the way.

Two other circumstances need explanation. Laura told me, long after, that she

had received a farewell letter from Mr. Carmel, who told her that he had written to warn me, but with much precaution, as Sir Harry had a strong antipathy to persons of his profession, of a danger which he was not then permitted to define. Monsieur Droqville, whom Mr. Marston had courted, and sought to draw into relations with him, had received a letter from that young man, stating that he had made up his mind to leave America by the next ship, and establish himself once more at Dorracleugh. It was Mr. Carmel, then, who had written the note that puzzled me so much, and conveyed it, by another hand, to the post-office of Cardyllion.

Monsieur Droqville had no confidence in Richard Marston. He had been informed, besides, of the exact nature of Sir Harry's will, and of a provision that made his bequest to me void, in case I should embrace the Roman Catholic faith.

It was in consequence of that provision in

the draft-will of Sir Harry Rokestone, and from a consideration of the impolicy of any action while Lady Lorrimer's death was so recent, and my indignation so hot, that Droqville had resolved that, for a time, at least, the attempt to gain me to the Church of Rome should not be renewed.

Taking the clear, hard view they do of the office of the Church upon earth, they are right to discriminate. In the sight of Heaven, the souls of Dives and of Lazarus are equally precious. In electing which to convert, then, they discharge but a simple duty in choosing that proselyte who will most strengthen the influence and action of the Church upon earth. In that respect, considering the theories they hold, they do right. Common sense acquits them.

I have now ended my necessary chapter of explanation, and my story goes on its way.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE LAST OF THE ROKESTONES.

A SOLEMN low-voiced fuss was going on in the old house at Dorracleugh; preparations and consultations were afoot; a great deal was not being done, but there were the whispering and restlessness of expectation, and the few grisly arrangements for the reception of the coffined guest.

Old Mrs. Shackleton, the housekeeper, crept about the rooms, her handkerchief now and then to her eyes; and the housemaid-in-chief, with her attendant women, was gliding about.

Sir Harry had, years before, left a letter

in Mr. Blount's hands, that there might be no delay in searching for a will directing all that concerned his funeral.

The coffin was to be placed in the great hall of the house, according to ancient custom, on tressels, under the broad span of the chimney. This arrangement is more than once alluded to in Pepys's Diary. He was to be followed to the grave by his tenantry, and such of the gentry, his neighbours, as might please to attend. There was to be an ample repast for all comers, consisting of as much "meat and drink of the best as they could consume;" what remained was to be distributed among the poor in the evening.

He was to be laid in the family vault adjoining the church of Golden Friars; a stone with the family arms, and a short inscription, "but no flatteries," was to be set up in the church, on the south wall, next the vault, and near the other family monuments, and it was to mention that he died unmar-

ried, and was the last of the old name of Rokestone, of Dorracleugh.

The funeral was to proceed to Golden Friars, not by the "mere road," but, as in the case of other family funerals, from Dorracleugh to Golden Friars, by the old high-road.

If he should die at home, at Dorracleugh, but not otherwise, he was to be "waked" in the same manner as his father and his grandfather had been.

There were other directions, presents to the sexton and parish-clerk, and details that would weary you.

About twelve o'clock the hearse arrived, and two or three minutes after Mr. Blount drove up in a chaise.

The almost gigantic coffin was carried up the steps, and placed under the broad canopy assigned to it at the upper end of the hall.

Mr. Blount, having given a few directions, inquired for Mr. Marston, and found

that gentleman, in a suit of black, in the drawing-room.

He came forward; he did not intend it, but there was something in the gracious and stately melancholy of his reception, which seemed to indicate not only the chief mourner, but the master of the house.

"Altered circumstances—a great change," said Mr. Marston, taking his hand. "Many will feel his death deeply. He was to me—I have said it a thousand times—the best friend that ever man had."

"Yes, yes, sir; he did show wonderful patience and forbearance with you, considering his temper, which was proud and fiery, you know—poor gentleman!—poor Sir Harry!—but grandly generous, sir, grandly generous."

"It is a consolation to me, having lost a friend, and, I may say, a father, who was, in patience, forbearance, and generosity, all you describe, and all you know, that we were lately, thanks, my good friend, mainly

to your kind offices, upon the happiest terms. He used to talk to me about that farm; he took such an interest in it—sit down, pray—won't you have some sherry and a biscuit?—and such a growing interest in me."

"I think he really was coming gradually not to think quite so ill of you as he did," said good Mr. Blount. "No sherry, no biscuit—no, I shan't mind. I know, sir, that under great and sudden temptation a man may do the thing he ought not to have done, and repent from his heart afterwards, and from very horror of his one great lapse, may walk, all the rest of his life, not only more discreetly, but more safely than a man who has never slipped at all. But Sir Harry was sensitive and fiery. He had thought that you were to represent the old house, and perhaps to bear the name after his death; and that both should be slurred by, if I may be allowed the expression, a shabby crime . . . . "

"Once for all, Mr. Blount, you'll be good enough to remember that such language is offensive and intolerable," interrupted Richard Marston, firmly and sharply. "My uncle had a right to lecture me on the subject—you can have none."

"Except as a friend," said Mr. Blount. "I shall, however, for the future, observe your wishes upon that subject. You got my letter about the funeral, I see."

"Yes, they are doing everything exactly as you said," said Marston, recovering his affability.

"Here is the letter," said Mr. Blount. "You should run your eye over it."

"Ha! It is dated a long time ago," said Mr. Marston. "It was no sudden presentiment, then. How well he looked when I was leaving this!"

"We are always astonished when death gives no warning," said Mr. Blount; "it hardly ever does to the persons most interested. Doctors, friends, they themselves, are

all in a conspiracy to conceal the thief who has got into the bedroom. It matters very little that the survivors have had warning."

Richard Marston shook his head and shrugged his shoulders.

"Some day I must learn prudence," said he.

"Let it be the true prudence," said Mr. Blount. "It is a short foresight that sees no further than the boundary of this life."

Mr. Marston opened the letter, and the old gentleman left him, to see after the preparations.

Someone at Golden Friars—I think it was the vicar—sent me the country paper, with a whole column in mourning, with a deep, black edge, giving a full account of the funeral of Sir Harry Rokestone, of Dorracleugh. The ancient family whose name he bore was now extinct. I saw in the list the names of county people who had come in their carriages more than twenty miles to attend the funeral, and people who had come

by rail hundreds of miles. It was a great county gathering mostly that followed the last of the Rokestones, of Dorracleugh, to the grave.

CHAPTER XXIV.

SEARCH FOR THE WILL.

THE funeral was over; but the old house of Dorracleugh was not quiet again till the night fell, and there was no more to-ing and fro-ing in the stable-yard, and the last tenant had swallowed his last draught of beer, and mounted and ridden away through the mist, over the fells, to his distant farm.

The moon shone peacefully over mere and fell, and on the time-worn church of Golden Friars, and through the window, bright, on the grey flags that lie over Sir Harry Rokestone. Never did she keep serener watch over the first night of a mortal's sleep in his last narrow bed.

Richard Marston saw this pure light, and musing, looked from the window. It shone, he thought, over his wide estate. Beyond the mere, all but Clusted, for many a mile was his own. At this side, away in the direction of distant Haworth, a broad principality of moss and heath, with scattered stretches of thin arable and pasture, ran side by side with the Mardykes estate, magnificent in vastness, if not in rental.

His dreams were not of feudal hospitality and the hearty old-world life. His thoughts were far away from this grand scenery or lonely Dorracleugh. Ambition built his castles in the air; nothing very noble. It was not even the tawdry and tradesman-like ambition of modern times. He had no taste for that particular form of meanness, nor patience for its drudgery. He would subscribe to election funds, place his county influence at the disposal of the minister; spend money on getting and keeping a seat; be found in his place whenever a critical

vote was impending; and by force of this, and of his county position, and the old name —for he would take the name of Rokestone, in spite of his uncle's awkward direction about his epitaph, and no one could question his relationship—by dint of all this, with, I daresay, the influence of a high marriage, he hoped to get on, not from place to place, but what would answer him as well, from title to title. First to revive the baronetage, and then, after some fifteen or twenty years more of faithful service, to become Baron Rokestone, of Dorracleugh.

It was not remorse, then, that kept the usurper's eyes wide open, as he lay that night in the dark in his bed, his brain in a fever. His conscience had no more life in it than the window-stone. It troubled him with no compunction. There was at his heart, on the contrary, a vindictive elation at having defeated with so much simplicity the unnatural will of his uncle.

Bright rose the sun next morning over

Dorracleugh, a sun of good omen. Richard Marston had appointed three o'clock as the most convenient hour for all members of the conference, for a meeting and a formality. A mere formality, in truth, it was, a search for the will of Sir Harry Rokestone. Mr. Blount had slept at Dorracleugh. Mr. Jarlcot, a short, plump man, of five-and-fifty, with a grave face and a bullet head, covered with short, lank, black hair, accompanied by his confidential man, Mr. Spaight, arrived in his gig, just as the punctual clock of Dorracleugh struck three.

Very soon after the old vicar rode up, on his peaceable pony, and came into the drawing-room, where the little party were assembled, with sad, kind face, and gentle, old-fashioned ceremony, with a little powdering of dust in the wrinkles of his clerical costume.

It was with a sense of pleasant satire that Richard Marston had observed old Lemuel Blount ever since he had been assured that

the expected will was not forthcoming. These holy men, how they love an annuity! Not that they like money, of course; that's Mammon; but because it lifts them above earthly cares, and gives them the power of relieving the wants of their fellow-Christians. How slyly the old gentleman had managed it! How thoughtful his appointing himself guardian to the young lady! What endless opportunities his powers over the settlements would present of making handsome terms for himself with an intending bridegroom!

On arriving, in full confidence that the will was safe in its iron repository, Christian could not have looked more comfortable when he enjoyed his famous prospect from the delectable mountains. But when it turned out that the will was nowhere, the same Christian, trudging on up the hill of difficulty in his old "burdened fashion," could not have looked more hang-dog and overpowered than he.

His low spirits, his sighs and ejaculations, amused Richard Marston extremely. When he heard him say to himself, when first he learned that the vicar had looked into the safe, and found nothing, "How sad! How strange! How very sad!" as he stood at the window, with his head lowered, and his fingers raised, he was tempted to rebuke his audacity with some keen and cautious irony; but those who win may laugh—he could afford to be good-humoured, and a silent sneer contented him.

Mr. Blount, having, as I said, heard that the vicar had searched the "safe," and that Mr. Spaight, accompanied by Mr. Marston, and the housekeeper, had searched all the drawers, desks, boxes, presses, and other lock-up places in the house in vain, for any paper having even a resemblance to a will, said: "It is but a form; but as you propose it, be it so."

And now this form was to be complied with. Mr. Marston told the servant to send

Mrs. Shackleton with the keys. Mr. Marston led the way, and four other gentlemen followed, attended by the housekeeper.

There was not much talking; a clatter of feet on uncarpeted floors, the tiny jingle of small keys, the opening of doors, and clapping of lids, and now and then Mrs. Shackleton's hard treble was heard in answer to an interrogatory.

This went on for more than twenty minutes up-stairs, and then the exploring party came down the stairs again, Richard Marston talking to the vicar, Mr. Blount to Mr. Spaight, while Mr. Jarlcot, the attorney, listened to Mrs. Shackleton, the housekeeper.

Richard Marston led the party to Sir Harry's room. The carpet was still on the floor, the curtains hanging still, in gloomy folds, to the ground. Sir Harry's hat and stick lay on the small round table, where he had carelessly thrown them when he came in from his last walk about Dorracleugh, his slippers

lay on the hearthrug before his easy-chair, and his pipe was on the mantelpiece.

The party stood in this long and rather gloomy room in straggling disarray, still talking.

"There's Pixie," said old Mr. Spaight, who had been a bit of a sportsman, and loved coursing in his youth, as he stopped before a portrait of a greyhound, poking his long nose and spectacles, with a faint smirk, close into the canvas. "Sir Harry's dog; fine dog, Pixie, won the cup twice on Doppleton Lea thirty-two years ago." But this was a murmured meditation, for he was a staid man of business now, and his liking for dogs and horses was incongruous, and no one in the room heard him. Mr. Jarlcot's voice recalled him.

"Mr. Marston was speaking to you, Mr. Spaight."

"Oh! I was just saying I think nothing could have been more careful," said Mr. Marston, "than the search you made up-

stairs, in presence of me and Mrs. Shackleton, on Thursday last?"

"No, sir—certainly nothing—it could not possibly have escaped us," answered Mr. Spaight.

"And that is your opinion also?" asked Mr. Jarlcot of Richard Marston.

"Clearly," he answered.

"I'll make a note of that, if you allow me," said Mr. Jarlcott; and he made an entry, with Mr. Marston's concurrence, in his pocket-book.

"And now about this," said Mr. Jarlcot, with a clumsy bow to Mr. Marston, and touching the door of the safe with his open hand.

"You have got the key, sir?" said Marston to the good vicar with silver hair, who stood meekly by, distrait and melancholy, an effigy of saintly contemplation.

"Oh, yes," said the vicar, wakening up. "Yes; the key, but—but you know there's nothing there."

He moved the key vaguely about as he looked from one to the other, as if inviting anyone who pleased to try.

"I think, sir, perhaps it will be as well if you will kindly open it yourself," said Marston.

"Yes, surely—I suppose so—with all my heart," said the vicar.

The door of the safe opened easily, and displayed the black iron void, into which all looked.

Blessed are they who expect nothing, for they shall not be disappointed. Of course no one was surprised. But Mr. Blount shook his head, lifted up his hands, and groaned audibly, "I am very sorry."

Mr. Marston did not affect to hear him.

CHAPTER XXV.

A DISAPPOINTMENT.

"I THINK," said Mr. Jarlcot, "it will be desirable that I should take a note of any information which Mr. Marston and the vicar may be so good as to supply with respect to the former search in the same place. I think, sir," he continued, addressing the vicar, "you mentioned that the deceased, Sir Harry Rokestone, placed that key in your charge on the evening of his departure from this house for London?"

"So it was, sir," said the vicar.

"Was it out of your possession for any time?"

"For about three quarters of an hour. I handed it to Mr. Marston on his way to this house; but as I was making a sick-call near this, I started not many minutes after he left me, and on the way it struck me that I might as well have back the key. I arrived here, I believe, almost as soon as he, and he quite agreed with me that I had better get the key back again into——"

"Into your own custody," interposed Marston. "You may recollect that it was I who suggested it the moment you came."

"And the key was not out of your possession, Mr. Marston, during the interval?" said Mr. Jarlcot.

"Not for one moment," answered Richard Marston, promptly.

"And you did not, I think you mentioned, open that safe?"

"Certainly not. I made no use whatever of that key at any time. I never saw that safe open until the vicar opened it in my presence, and we both saw that it contained

nothing; so did Mrs. Shackleton, as intelligent a witness as any. And, I think, we can all—I know I can, for my part—depose, on oath, to the statements we have made."

Mr. Jarlcot raised his eyebrows solemnly, slowly shook his head, and, having replaced his note-book in his pocket, drew a long breath in through his rounded lips, with a sound that almost amounted to a whistle.

"Nothing can be more distinct; it amounts to demonstration," he said, raising his head, putting his hands into his trousers-pockets, and looking slowly round the cornice. "Haven't you something to say?" he added, laying his hand gently on Mr. Blount's arm, and then turning a step or two away; while Marston, who could not comprehend what he fancied to be an almost affected disappointment at the failure to discover a will, thought he saw his eyes wander, when he thought no one was looking, curiously to the

grate and the hobs; perhaps in search, as he suspected, of paper ashes.

"I am awfully sorry," exclaimed Mr. Blount, throwing himself into a chair in undisguised despondency. "The will, as it was drafted, would have provided splendidly for Miss Ethel Ware, and left you, Mr. Marston, an annuity of two thousand five hundred a year, and a sum of five thousand pounds. For two or three years I had been urging him to execute it; it is evident he never did. He has destroyed the draft, instead of executing it. That hope is quite gone—totally."

Mr. Blount stood up and said, laying his hand upon his forehead, "I am grieved—I am shocked—I am profoundly grieved."

Mr. Marston was strongly tempted to tell Mr. Blount what he thought of him. Jarlcot and he, no doubt, understood one another, and had intended making a nice thing of it.

He could not smile, nor even sneer, just

then, but Mr. Marston fixed on Lemuel Blount a sidelong look of the sternest contempt.

"There is, then," said Mr. Blount, collecting himself, "no will."

"That seems pretty clear," said Mr. Marston, with, in spite of himself, a cold scorn in his tone. "I think so; and I rather fancy you think so too."

"Except this," continued Mr. Blount, producing a paper from his pocket, at which he had been fumbling. "Mr. Jarlcot will hand you a copy. I urged him, God knows how earnestly, to revoke it. It was made at the period of his greatest displeasure with you; it leaves everything to Miss Ethel Ware, and gives you, I grieve to say, but an annuity of four hundred a year. It appoints me guardian to the young lady, in the same terms that the latter will would have done, and leaves me, besides, an annuity of five hundred a year, half of which I shall, if you don't object, make over to you."

"Oh! oh! a will? That's all right," said Marston, trying to smile with lips that had grown white; "I, of course, you—we all wish nothing but what is right and fair."

Mr. Jarlcot handed him a new neatly-folded paper, endorsed "Copy of the Will of the late Sir Harry Rokestone, Bart." Richard Marston took it with a hand that trembled, a hand that had not often trembled before.

"Then, I suppose, Mr. Blount, you will look in on me, by-and-by, to arrange about the steps to be taken about proving it," said Mr. Jarlcot.

"It's all right, I dare say," said Mr. Marston, vaguely, looking from man to man uncertainly. "I expected a will, of course; I don't suppose I have a friend among you, gentlemen, why should I? I am sure I have some enemies. I don't know what country attorneys, and nincompoops, and Golden Friars' bumpkins may think of it, but I know what the world will think, that

I'm swindled by a d—d conspiracy, and that that old man, who's in his grave, has behaved like a villain."

"Oh, Mr. Marston, your dead uncle!" said the good vicar, lifting his hand in deprecation, with gentle horror. "You wouldn't, you can't!"

"What the devil is it to you, sir?" cried Marston, with a look as if he could have struck him. "I say it's all influence, and d—d juggling—I'm not such a simpleton. No one expected, of course, that opportunities like those should not have been improved. The thing's transparent. I wish you joy, Mr. Blount, of your five hundred a year, and you, Mr. Jarlcot, of your approaching management of the estates and the money. If you fancy a will like that, turning his own nephew adrift on the world in favour of methodists and attorneys, and a girl he never saw till the other day, is to pass unchallenged, you're very much mistaken; it's just the thing that always happens when an

old man like that dies—there's a will of course—every one understands it. I'll have you all where you won't like."

Mrs. Shackleton, with her mouth pursed, her nose high in air, and her brows knit over a vivid pair of eyes, was the only one of the group who seemed ready to explode in reply; Mr. Blount looked simply shocked and confounded; the vicar maintained his bewildered and appealing stare; Mr. Spaight's eyebrows were elevated above his spectacles, and his mouth opened, as he leaned forward his long nose; Mr. Jarlcot's brow looked thunderous, and his chops a little flushed; all were staring for some seconds in silence on Mr. Marston, whose concluding sentences had risen almost to a shriek, with a laugh running through it.

"I think, Mr. Marston," said Jarlcot, after a couple of efforts, "you would do well to—to consider, a little, the bearing of your language; I don't think you can quite see its force."

"I wish you could—I mean it; and I'm d—d but you shall feel it too! You shall hear of me sooner than you all think. I'm not a fellow to be pigeoned so simply."

With these words, he walked into the hall, and a few moments after they heard the door shut with a violent clang.

A solemn silence reigned in the room for a little time; these peaceable people seemed stunned by the explosion.

"Evasit, erupit," murmured the vicar, sadly, raising his hands, and shaking his head. "How very painful!"

"I don't wonder—I make great allowances," said Mr. Blount, "I have been very unhappy myself, ever since it was ascertained that he had not executed the new will. I am afraid the young man will never consent to accept a part of my annuity—he is so spirited."

"Don't be uneasy on that point," said Mr. Jarlcot; "if you lodge it, he'll draw it;

not—but I think—you might do—better—with your money."

There was something in the tone, undefinable, that prompted a dark curiosity.

Mr. Blount turned on him a quick look of inquiry. Mr. Jarlcot lowered his eyes, and then turned them to the window, with the remark that the Summer was making a long stay this year.

Mr. Blount looked down and slowly rubbed his forehead, thinking, and sighing deeply, as he said, "It's a wonderful world, this—may the Lord have mercy on us all!"

CHAPTER XXVI.

A WOMAN'S HEART.

TWO or three notices, which, Mr. Jarlcot said, would not cost five pounds, were served on behalf of Mr. Marston, and with these the faint echo of his thunders subsided. There was, in fact, no material for litigation.

"The notices," Mr. Jarlcot said, "came from Marshall and Whitaker, the solicitors who had years before submitted the cases for him, upon his uncle's title, and upon the question of his own position as nearest of kin and heir-at-law. He was very carefully advised as to how exactly he should

stand in the event of his uncle's dying intestate."

I was stunned when I heard of my enormous fortune, involving, as it did, his ruin. I would at once have taken measures to deal as generously with him as the other will, of which I then knew no more than that Sir Harry must have contemplated, at one time, the possibility at least of signing it.

When I left Golden Friars I did so with an unalterable resolution never to see Richard Marston again. But this was compatible with the spirit of my intention to provide more suitably for him. I took Mr. Blount into council; but I was disappointed. The will had been made during my father's lifetime, and in evident apprehension of his influence over me, and deprived me of the power of making any charge upon the property, whether land or money. I could do nothing but make him a yearly present of a

part of my income, and even that was embarrassed by many ingenious conditions and difficulties.

It was about this time that a letter reached me from Richard Marston, the most extraordinary I had ever read—a mad letter in parts, and wicked—a letter, also, full of penitence and self-upbraiding. "I am a fiend. I have been all cruelty and falsehood, you all mercy and truth," it said. "I have heard of your noble wishes—I know how vain they are. You can do nothing that I would accept. I am well enough. Think no more of the wretch. I have found, too late, I cannot live without you. You shall hear of me no more; only forgive me."

There are parts of this strange letter that I never understood, that may bear many interpretations, no one distinctly.

When Mr. Blount spoke of him he never gave me his conclusions, and it was always in

the sad form "Let us hope;" he never said exactly what he suspected. Mr. Jarlcot plainly had but one opinion of him, and that the worst.

I agreed, I think, with neither. I relied on instinct, which no one can analyse or define—the wild inspiration of nature—the saddest, and often the truest guide. Let me not condemn, then, lest I be condemned.

The good here are not without wickedness, nor the wicked without goodness. With death begins the defecation. Each character will be sifted as wheat. The eternal Judge will reduce each, by the irresistible chemistry of his power and truth, to its basis, for neither hell nor heaven can receive a mixed character.

I did hear of Richard Marston again once more—it was about five months later, when the news of his death by fever, at Marseilles, reached Mr. Blount.

Since then my life has been a retrospect. Two years I passed in India with my beloved friend, Laura. But my melancholy grew deeper; the shadows lengthened—and an irrepressible yearning to revisit Golden Friars and Malory seized me. I returned to England.

I am possessed of fortune. I thank God for its immunities—I well know how great they are. For its pleasures, I have long ceased to care. To the poor, I try to make it useful—but I am quite conscious that in this there is no merit. I have no pleasure in money. I think I have none in flattery. I need deny myself nothing, and yet be in the eyes of those who measure charity arithmetically a princely Christian benefactress. I wish I were quite sure of having ever given a cup of cold water in the spirit that my Maker commends.

A few weeks after my return, Mr. Blount showed me a letter. The signature startled

me. It was from Monsieur Droqville, and a very short one. It was chiefly upon some trifling business, and it said, near the end,

"You sometimes see Miss Ware, I believe; she will be sorry to hear that her old friend, Mr. Carmel, died last Summer at his missionary post in South America. A truer soldier of Christ never fell in the field of his labours. Requiescat!"

There was a tremble at my heart, and a swelling. I held the sentence before my eyes till they filled with tears.

My faithful, noble friend! At my side in every trouble. The one of all mortals I have met who strove with his whole heart to win me, according to his lights, to God. May God receive and for ever bless you for it, patient, gentle Edwyn Carmel! His griefs are over. To me there seems an angelic light around him—the pale enthusiast in the robe of his purity stands saint-like

before me. I remember all your tender care. I better understand, too, the wide differences that separated us, now, than in my careless girlhood—but these do not dismay me. I know that "in my father's house are many mansions," and I hope that when the clouds that darken this life are passed, we may yet meet and thank and bless you, my noble-hearted friend, where, in one love and light, the redeemed shall walk for evermore.

At Golden Friars I lived again for a short time. But the associations of Dorracleugh were too new and harrowing. I left that place to the care of good Mr. Blount, who loves it better than any other. He pays me two or three visits every year at Malory, and advises me in all matters of business.

I do not affect the airs of an anchorite. But my life is, most people would think, intolerably monotonous and lonely. To me it

is not only endurable, but the sweetest that, in my peculiar state of mind, I could have chosen.

With the flight of my years, and the slow approach of the hour when dust will return to dust, the love of solitude steals on me, and no regrets for the days I have lost, as my friends insist, and no yearnings for a return to an insincere and tawdry world, have ever troubled me. In girlhood I contracted my love of this simple rural solitude, and my premature experience of all that is disappointing and deplorable in life confirms it. But the spell of its power is in its recollections. It is a place, unlike Dorracleugh, sunny and cheerful, as well as beautiful, and this tones the melancholy of its visions, and prevents their sadness from becoming overpowering.

I wonder how many people are living, like me, altogether in the past, and in hourly communion with visionary companions?

Richard Marston, does a waking hour ever pass without, at some moment, recalling your image? I do not mistake you; I have used no measured language in describing you. I know you for the evil, fascinating, reckless man you were. Such a man as, had I never seen you, and only known the sum of his character, I ought to have hated. A man who, being such as he was, meditated against me a measureless wrong. I look into my heart, is there vengeance there against you? Is there judgment? Is there even alienation?

Oh! how is it that reason, justice, virtue, all cannot move you from a secret place in my inmost heart? Can any man who has once been an idol, such as you were, ever perish utterly in that mysterious shrine—a woman's heart? In solitary hours, as I, unseen, look along the sea, my cheeks are wet with tears; in the wide silence of the night my lonely sobs are heard. Is my

grief for you mere madness? Why is it that man so differs from man? Why does he often so differ from the noble creature he might have been, and sometimes almost was?

Over an image partly dreamed and partly real, shivered utterly, but still in memory visible, I pour out the vainest of all sorrows.

In the wonderful working that subdues all things to itself—in all the changes of spirit, or the spaces of eternity, is there, shall there never be, from the first failure, evolved the nobler thing that might have been? I care for no other. I can love no other; and were I to live and keep my youth through eternity, I think I never could be interested or won again. Solitude has become dear to me, because he is in it. Am I giving this infinite true love in vain? I comfort myself with one vague hope. I cannot think that nature is so cynical. Does

the loved phantom represent nothing? And is the fidelity that nature claims, but an infatuation and a waste?

THE END.

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